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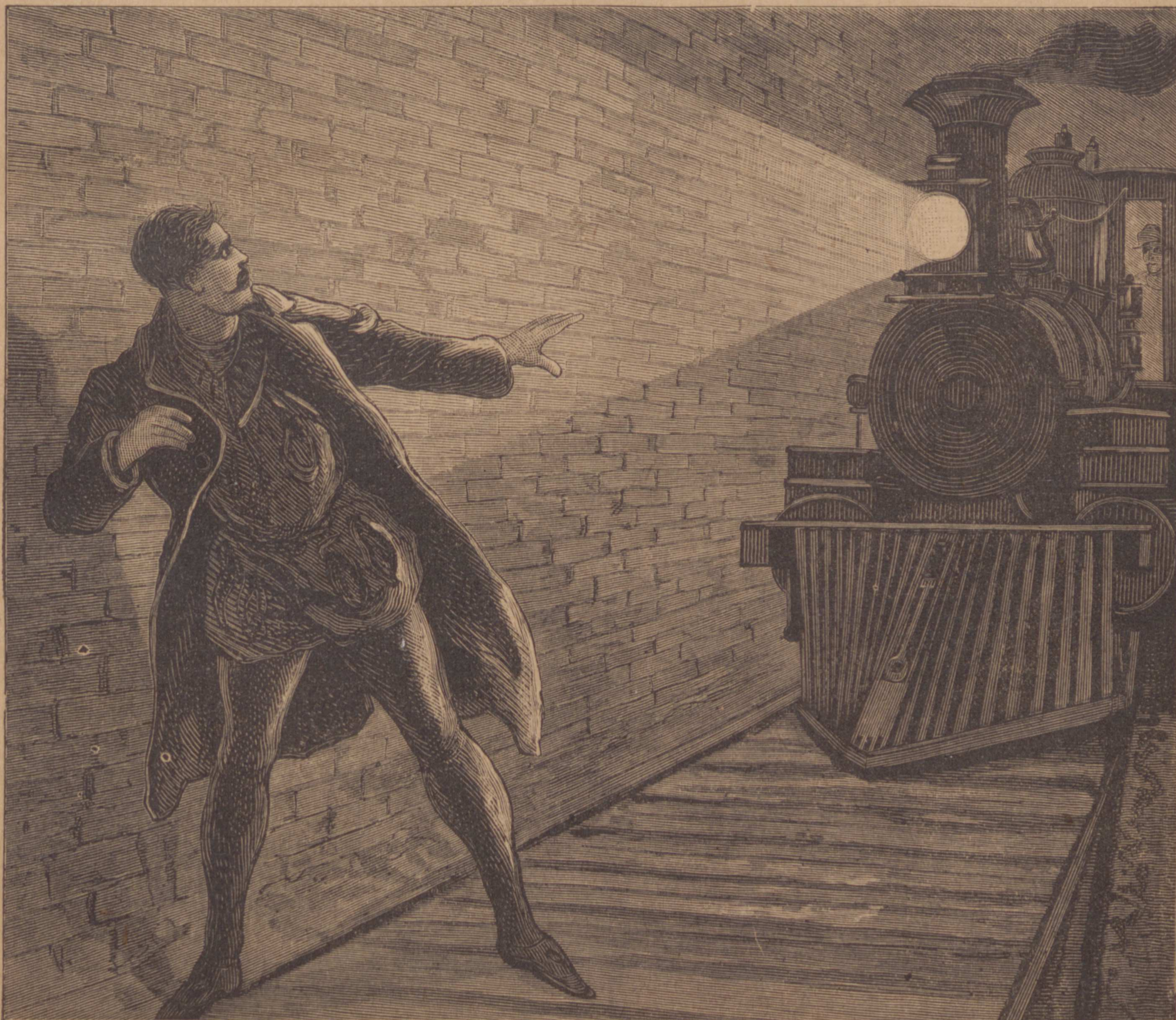
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Vol. LX.

CAPTAIN CORDEN, the Twister Detective.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS,

AUTHOR OF "SLEEPLESS EYE," "WILD PETE, THE BRONCHO BUSTER," "THE DRUMMER DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.



THERE WAS NO HOPE! THE HEAT OF THE BOILER SENT A WARM BREATH OVER HIS BLANCHED FEATURES,
AND HE KNEW THAT HE WAS DOOMED!

Captain Corden

The TWISTER DETECTIVE;

OR,

Snaring Slippery New York Crooks.

BY GEO. C. JENKS,

AUTHOR OF "SLEEPLESS-EYE," "WILD PETE,"
THE BRONCHO BUSTER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

FOILED BY THE SERPENT.

THE masquerade ball was in full blast.

Every window of the great Academy of Music on Fourteenth street, New York, was ablaze with light, and inside the building the gayly-dressed dancers passed hither and thither in a kaleidoscopic confusion of bright colors that was enough to turn the brain of any one not accustomed to such scenes. The stage and auditorium had been thrown into one by means of a false flooring over the chairs in the parquette, so that there was a vast level dancing space from the back of the stage to the lobby in the rear of the parquette circle. Tall palms and fragrant flowers were everywhere, while the odors of rare exotics mingled with the delicate perfumes carried by the fair dancers, and emphasized the feeling that stole over every one, that this was indeed fairy-land.

The music, from one of the best orchestras in New York, added to the glamour, and one could hardly realize that outside the streets were cold and cheerless, and that people were generally at home and in bed at this hour.

It was just midnight, and the supper served in the rooms leading from the ball-room was attracting a large portion of the merry-makers, although the dreamy waltz just commenced was powerful enough to keep some of them gliding over the waxed floor in an abandon of enjoyment of the sweet strains.

Costumes of all kinds were worn, the principal purpose seeming to be to get bright colors that would look well under the electric lights, and help to form a portion of a harmonious whole. There were knights, soldiers, courtiers, princes, princesses, peasant girls, harlequins, pierrots, Folly, with her cap and bells, and any number of non-descript costumes that did not represent anything in particular save the vagrant fancy of the wearer.

It was during the maddest strains of a rather exciting waltz, in which some hundreds of couples were participating, that a tall man, in the slashed doublet and hose of a Spanish grandee, over which was carelessly thrown a large cloak, stood behind a pillar, and, after watching the whirling throng for a moment, emitted a low but shrill whistle, that penetrated the sound of the music, and drew to his side a creature the very opposite of himself in appearance. He was a small misshapen man, in evening dress, and wearing a black mask. He had a long nose, and when he spoke there was a snuffle in his tones that proclaimed him at once to be an English Jew of the lower order.

"Vat you want, my tear?" he whined, in a low tone. "I thought I 'eerd you whistle."

"It is a wonder you could hear anything. You seem to be getting sillier every day," was the ungracious response of the other.

"No. That was because you was worried 'bout the job, and did not gif credit to your friends, my tear."

"Friends! You impudent rascal! Do you dare to call yourself friend?"

"Vell, then, your chum," returned the Jew, with a malicious grin that revealed his yellow fangs, and did not add to his beauty. "Ve works together, don't ve? An' if ve ain't friends, it's your own fault. I'd do anything for you, Serpent."

Although the Jew spoke in a whining tone, and rubbed his hands in an obsequious manner as he uttered these words, there was a dangerous gleam in the eyes that could be seen through the holes in his black mask, and one could fancy that the yellow fangs would tear and rend an enemy without hesitation should occasion arise.

Perhaps the man he had addressed as the

Serpent thought so, too, for he did not answer for a moment, as if he were collecting his ideas and trying to make up his mind whether it would be safe to give an angry reply. Apparently he decided in the negative, for when he addressed his companion again, it was in a much milder tone.

"See here, Morris Cohen, this is no time for idle talk. We are here for a certain purpose—"

"Of course ve are, my tear. Ve are here to enjoy the dancing, and to see all the pretty ladies, and to eat our supper, and to mingle with the good peoples what haf nodings to do but to enjoy themselves. That's vat ve are here for. An' ve are having a good time, ain't ve, and when the ball breaks up, ve are going right home to bed, like good little boys, ain't ve?"

The grin on Morris Cohen's face had become more expansive than ever, and he looked as much like an imp that had been promoted to a high position below on account of his ugliness, as could well be conceived.

"Is he here?" asked the other, without replying directly to the Jew's rhapsody.

"Indeed he was, and he is in the right kind of state to make our work very easy."

"Drunk?"

"As a boiled owl, my tear."

"Good! Where is he now?"

Ere Morris Cohen could answer, somebody struck the larger man a tremendous blow on the back, that sent him forward from his shelter behind the pillar, in a very undignified manner.

"What are you (hic) two old ravens (hic) croaking about?" cried the new-comer, steadying himself by holding tight to Morris Cohen.

He was a young man, with a handsome face, that was terribly flushed by drinking just now, but that was not the flush of a confirmed drunkard. He wore evening dress, and his disheveled shirt-front, the stains of wine on his white vest, and the crumpled condition of his coat, all indicated that he had been spending some time in the wine-room, and had been drinking more than was good for him.

The one addressed as the "Serpent" recovered himself, after staggering under the weight of the blow that had been inflicted by the young man in a spirit of drunken playfulness, and forcing himself to smile, said, in as mild a tone as he could assume at the moment:

"Why, Walter! I am sorry to see you in this condition."

"Now, see here, Jim Daly, don't you go putting on any airs with me (hic.) You are no saint, even if you don't get drunk. I have never been so far gone before as I am to-night, and when I get over this (hic) I never will be again. If I hadn't met that sanctimonious Morris, there, I wouldn't have done it to-night."

The Jew grinned, as he held up his hands, deprecatingly, and whined:

"Vell, ve was so very glad to see one another, that ve had to open a bottle to celebrate it. If there was any one in New York vat I love, it was Valter Vantine, and he loves me, Serpent, like nothing as never was."

"Where are you going now, Walter?" asked Jim Daly.

"Where am I going? What a question! (hic) I am going to dance the mazy (hic) waltz, and here is my partner."

He turned toward a woman who had stolen up unperceived by the Jew or Daly, and was standing at their elbow. She was dressed in a long black velvet robe, on which ornaments of steel glistened here and there, while on her forehead, among the thick dark tresses that hung low over her eyes, was a diamond star, hardly rivaling in brightness the eyes that could be seen flashing through the black lace that covered her face in lieu of the regulation mask.

Like a gleam of lightning a look of intelligence was exchanged between this woman and the Serpent, as she took the arm of the young man, and suffered herself to be drawn into the throng of dancers in the middle of the room, where Walter Vantine led her through a very zig-zaggy waltz.

"That's all right. Kate Fairleigh has him in tow, and she will take care that he is kept here till we want to use him," muttered

Jim Daly. "The Queen of Night, eh? Very good character for her. I don't know a cleverer female crook in the whole city of New York. It's a pity women don't go into the business of cracking cribs. She has all the nerve required for such a job, and her delicate fingers would be just the thing for working the combinations of safes."

"Vat's that you say about combinations of safes, my tear?" put in Morris, with his usual grin.

"Nothing. I did not say so, did I?"

"Yes, you did, my tear. You ought to break yourself of the habit of talking to yourself, my tear, or you might find yourself talking to a policeman some time, an' then it would be awkward for you, don't you see?"

The music stopped and Daly saw Kate Fairleigh, on the arm of Wallace Vantine, making her way to the supper room. With a motion to the Jew to keep near him, Jim Daly made straight for the supper room, too.

He was passing along under the dress circle, toward the door of the short hallway that led to the room, when he suddenly darted aside, and pulling from a pocket a black mask, adjusted it on his face with almost lightning-like rapidity. Then he resumed his careless saunter toward the door.

He had not gone half-a-dozen steps, when a hand grasped his wrists and brought him up with a round turn, while a pleasant voice said, in his ear:

"What's your hurry, Serpent?"

The speaker was a young man, almost a boy, with an open, ingenuous countenance, ruddy and full, lighted up by a pair of wide-open innocent dark-blue eyes, shaded by lashes long and dark, that gave an almost sleepy expression to the face. Golden brown hair, in crisp curls, covered his head, as could be seen now, for he held his broad gray hat, with its sweeping white plume, in his hand. His costume was that of a cavalier of Charles II.'s time, and a long straight sword swung carelessly from his belt, as if ready for instant use. Lace ruffles fell over his hands, which were white and rather small, and altogether he looked like a very young dandy in the army of the "Merrie Monarch."

"You're breaking my wrist," growled Daly, in a low tone, in which fear and rage were curiously mingled.

"Am I?" was the quiet response. "Sorry!"

A glance at the white hand holding Daly's wrist would have perhaps revealed, if the look had been steady enough, that it was pressing with a vise-like grip, and that it was twisting the arm to such an extent and in such a way that the big man was wholly in the power of the good-natured young fellow, in the Charles II. costume.

"They don't call you 'Cool Bob, the Twister,' for nothing," grumbled Daly.

"So you know me, then?" returned the other in pretended surprise.

"Yes, as well as you know that my name is—"

"Jim Daly, commonly known as the Serpent," observed the young man, coolly. "I will give you five minutes to get out of this building," he added, still smiling, but without releasing his hold of the other's wrist.

"What for?"

"Don't argue, but do as I tell you," returned the other.

He released the wrist of the Serpent with a contemptuous gesture and threw him off. "Yes, do as Bob tells you, Serpent. That's vat I always do," put in the voice of the Jew at this juncture. "He won't never interfere with you, if you do vat he tells you."

Cool Bob looked steadily at Cohen for an instant—while that worthy stood rubbing his hands and grinning under his mask—and then disappeared, as suddenly as he had come into sight.

"Curse him!" muttered the Serpent, as he scowled around the room. "He is always interfering with my plans. I will get even with him yet, though, and he shall regret that he ever crossed the Serpent's trail."

"Vell, that was all right. But ve had better get out, my tear. Kate is a good girl, and she vill bring Valter to the crib in good time," suggested the Serpent's confederate,

looking uneasily about him as if he expected to meet the eyes of Cool Bob the Twister at every turn.

"For once, you are right," returned Daly. "We must get that young fool Vantine to the crib, and before he gets quite sober, obtain from him a written promise to help us in the job."

"Vat a lark it was!" snuffled Morris. "To make the young feller take a hand in robbing his own father's bank! He daren't blow the gaff on us when vonce ve get that paper."

"Shut up your wheezing, will you?" was the Serpent's ungracious response. "You talk too much."

"So do you, sometimes, my tear, as I told you a little while ago, so that we are even on that."

Jim Daly looked at his companion for a moment as if inclined to take him by the throat, but changed his mind, and strode swiftly to one of the doors leading to the street.

Reaching the corner of Fourteenth street, where the strains of the music came dreamily on the early morning air, he whistled softly, and out of the gloom, as if it had been produced by an enchanter's power, came a hansom cab.

"Get in!" commanded the Serpent, briefly, to Morris.

The other was about to obey, when he stopped suddenly and rubbed his hands in glee.

"Vell, this is good, by gracious!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"Get out of the way!" whispered Kate Farleigh, authoritatively, as she led Walter Vantine from the shadow of the building, where they had been standing unseen by the others, and handed him to Jim Daly.

Without a word, Daly lifted the young man bodily and placed him in the cab, following quickly, and closing the door.

"Morris!"

"Vell?"

"You need not come in the cab. Be at the crib as soon as you can, and I will join you in the course of an hour or so. I do not want to go straight there."

"All right. That was sensible."

This colloquy had been carried on in whispered tones, but the cabman, who had been sitting on his perch behind, had opened the trap in the roof of the cab and had heard every word! Why he had taken the trouble to listen to a matter that could hardly concern him we will discover, later.

In another moment Morris and Kate had disappeared, but whether they went together or not the cabman did not know.

"Drive up Fourth avenue," directed Jim Daly, pushing up the trap and letting it fall instantly.

"All roight, sorr," answered the cabman, and away went the cab along Fourteenth street to Union Square, where it turned to the right and went at a fair pace up Fourth avenue.

Hardly had it turned the corner when a lithe figure, dressed in a neat-fitting business-suit, of dark material, consisting of a tight sack coat with a soft felt hat surrounding the whole, leaped upon the step behind, while a hand seized the left wrist of the driver and gave it a gentle twist, causing the horse to swerve slightly.

"Ow!" exclaimed the driver, as he tried to pull his hand away.

"Silence!" ordered the stranger, in a stern whisper, that commanded obedience.

"Drive right on and take no notice of me."

"An' who moight yez be, I'd loike to be knowing? I don't allow no feller ter be taking liberties wid me now, do ye moind?"

The driver raised his whip threateningly, but a twist of his left wrist made him drop his whip on the roof of the cab with a movement of pain.

The stranger threw open the lapel of his coat and showed a small silver star on his vest, and the cabman's manner altered at once.

"Captain Corden!"

"Yes. Now, see here, Barney Doran. You will help me if I need it?"

"Sure! an I will, sor!"

"And I will see that your application to get on the force is favorably considered."

"Be jabbers. Oi'll do anything you tell me, sor!"

"Good! Now, drive straight on, until I tell you to turn off."

"Yis."

The driver whipped up his horse, which had dropped almost into a walk during the conversation. Captain Bob had released his wrist, and stood like a statue, apparently lost in thought.

Near the corner of Twenty-eighth street an ash-wagon obstructed the way, and the cab was brought to a stop.

"Git out of thot, wid yer ould mud wagon, will yez?" cried Barney.

"Git out yerself," came the reply from the ashman.

"Oi'll break yer face for yez if ye don't do as Oi tell yez" was Barney's retort, and there ensued a war of words between the ashman and the cabman that are so common in New York as never to provoke more than passing notice.

The wagon was right across the street, and as there was a new building in course of erection at this spot, the piles of brick and mortar took up the rest of the roadway not occupied by the wagon. Barney was about to get down to carry out his threat to break the face of the ashman, when Captain Bob interfered.

"Let me go to him, Barney."

"All roight, captain; but faix, Oi'd loike to have wan round wid him! Oi'd fix him up so thot his woife wouldn't let him into the house whin he goes home."

Bob leaped down and running to the ashman, seized him by the wrist, and gave it his favorite twist, so that the burly fellow howled for mercy, and turned his wagon out without further parley.

"Be gob, he's a daisy," muttered Barney to himself, delightedly.

Cool Corden was about to resume his place by the side of the driver, but thought it might be as well to glance at the occupants of the cab, more especially as they had been very quiet all through the trouble with the ashman.

The cab was empty!

CHAPTER II.

JUST ONE CHANCE!

WHEN Barney started his horse at Fourteenth street, Jim Daly was not taking everything for granted, as Barney and the detective supposed. He had not gained his sobriquet of "Serpent" for nothing. He was known as one of the slipperiest crooks in New York, and although he had been arrested several times for different crimes, a conviction had never been possible in his case. He knew as much about the law—that is, in evading it—as he did about burglary, and always so covered his tracks that the police had never been able to get him into their clutches, with a Sing Sing case against him.

With this character, no wonder that he kept his eyes open when he found himself in a cab, being driven by a man whom he had only seen once or twice, and whom he did not think fit to trust further than he could help.

So, when the detective jumped on the step of the cab he was seen by Daly, who happened to be looking through the side window, although any one seeing him might have thought that he was merely leaning his head there to rest it, after a night's pleasure at the ball.

"So, my dear Twister!" he muttered. "There is a plant, is there? Well, you haven't caught the Serpent, yet."

As the cab drove on he sat in deep thought, biting the end of his long black mustache, and trying to think out some plan of escape. That he was in a trap he felt certain, and it would require all the skill he possessed to get out of it.

The main thing was to leave the cab without being noticed. Not only that, but he must get his companion out, too. He had taken too many chances to get this young man into his power, to let him go now.

As will have been gathered from the conversation between Morris and the Serpent, it was the intention to break into the bank of which Walter Vantine's father was president and a large stockholder, and make Walter take part in the job. What power the two crooks held over the young fellow will be understood when it is explained that, in his half-intoxicated condition, earlier in the even-

ing, they had induced him to sign a check for five hundred dollars with his father's name, to pay a poker debt contracted in a game with Jim Daly the night before, and for which payment had been pressed to-night. The Serpent held the check, and it was his intention to make the son of the banker give certain assistance in the robbery of the bank, or to present the check for payment at the bank, with the natural result of the fraud being at once discovered, and of Walter Vantine being prosecuted for forgery. Alexander Vantine was well-known as a stern, hard man, of uncompromising integrity, who would prosecute his own son as soon as a stranger, and Walter would realize that there was no choice between the State Prison for forgery, or the possibility of getting there as an accomplice to the precious pair who were fast getting him into their toils.

"He's pretty far gone," muttered the Serpent, as he shook his companion and tried to bring some signs of life into him.

"Wha'sh ma'sher?" grunted Walter.

"The fool!" was Daly's mental reply.

He felt in a pocket of the doublet he still wore as a Spanish grandee, and drew forth a small vial, which contained some liquid. He held it up in the reflection of an electric light that the cab happened to be passing, and shook it till it was all in a foam. Then he took out the cork and held it to the lips of the young man.

The effect was peculiar. It cleared the speech and gave power to the limbs of the young fellow, but left him in a sort of hypnotic condition in which Jim Daly could hold him in perfect control.

"Ah! it would not do to try that too often, but it is mighty useful once in a while," observed the Serpent to himself, with an ugly smile of satisfaction. "Now I guess I can handle him all right."

It was at this moment that the cab was stopped by the ash-wagon at Twenty-eighth street.

In a twinkling, Jim Daly had signified to his companion that he was to get out, by catching him by the elbow. Walter did not say a word, nor offer the least resistance. So far as his movements were concerned, he might have been entirely sober, for he was steady as the Serpent himself. He obeyed the direction of the hand on his arm, and leaped out lightly on the right side of the cab, furthest from that on which now stood the detective, and then, still with the Serpent's hand upon him, walked swiftly along Twenty-eighth street to the east.

The maneuver had been accomplished so neatly, that it is no wonder neither the driver of the cab nor the mysterious individual with the powerful fingers, had noticed that their passengers had disappeared.

For perhaps two blocks had the two fleeing men passed along down this thoroughfare, the young man making no resistance, but going passively where he was led by his companion, when the Serpent, who had been keeping his eyes open for possible pursuit, crossed the street, and doubled on his track, coming back to Fourth avenue, having satisfied himself that the cab had gone.

For some distance up the avenue they walked rapidly, the Serpent deep in thought, and Walter Vantine moving mechanically, without uttering a word.

At the corner of a street, where a great stone-front building stood, they paused. There was a flight of iron steps leading to a massive door at the corner, and on the door was inscribed the word, "Bank."

"Why not?" muttered the Serpent. "If I could do the job without the help of Morris, it would be so much the better. I'll try it."

He whispered something in the ear of the young man, and Walter walked up the steps unhesitatingly and rapped thrice on the door with his knuckles, the Serpent standing in the shadow of the building, where he would not be seen by any one coming out of the bank.

The door opened cautiously, and a man of about fifty, with a pistol in his right hand, peered out.

"Hello, Peter!" said Walter, in a voice that was like that of a somnambulist.

"Why, Mr. Walter," returned the other in surprise, as he admitted the young man. "What are you doing here at this time?"

Without answering, Walter walked forward until he stood facing the great doors of the iron vault, Peter following him wonderingly, to see what he would do next.

"He is as full as a goose," was the mental ejaculation of Peter, the watchman. "I suppose he has stumbled in here, because he does not want to go home."

At the side of the vault there was a small private room occupied during the day by the president of the bank. In this room was a sofa, where a person lying on it would have a full view of the vault.

Without a word, Walter Vantine entered this room and threw himself upon the sofa. The next moment he was apparently fast asleep.

"This is a queer thing," thought Peter. "But I suppose it will have to go. Can't interfere with a man coming into his own father's bank, especially when he happens to be the cashier."

He walked to the front door which he remembered he had not fastened, and was in the act of turning the lock, when he was seized from behind, and the next instant was lying on his face, helpless as baby, while some strong cords were being passed around his arms and body, so that he could not move an inch. Then his revolver, which he had had no chance to use, was wrested from his hand, and he received a hearty kick in the side that knocked most of the breath out of the body.

The Serpent was standing over him, with an evil grin on his countenance, that was revealed in all its hideousness by the electric lamp at the rear of the bank, just before the iron door of the vault.

"So far, excellent," muttered the Serpent, as he glanced over at the slumbering Walter, who was snoring in a very hearty manner.

The Serpent was standing in the deep shadow behind the door, with the watchman, helpless, at his feet, when, casting his eyes toward the window that looked out upon Fourth avenue, he saw a face—the face of Captain Corden—Cool Bob, the Twister.

"Curse that fellow! He must be the devil himself!" was the Serpent's inaudible remark. "He is onto my game, and I'll be run in before I even commence the job. I was a fool to try to do it without Morris. He would never have let me run into a plant like this."

While thinking, the Serpent was acting. He stole softly to the door, turned the key without the least noise, and opening the door just wide enough to permit the passage of his body, leaped down the flight of steps at one jump, and ran up Fourth avenue at the top of his speed.

He had not gone half a dozen steps before he knew that he was followed. He did not look back, but instinct told him that his pursuer was none other than the Twister, one of the most astute, as well as dauntless detectives in New York.

For some distance the chase continued, with about the same distance between the men, until they reached a street where two cabs passing, close together, enabled the Serpent to increase his lead, by getting across ahead of them, but compelled the detective to wait until the vehicles had passed.

It was at this point that the Serpent reached a bridge over the railroad that runs up Fourth avenue, where it is tunneled for most of the distance. Over this bridge the Serpent swung himself and reaching the railroad track in safety, dashed at once into the tunnel.

Into the darkness he went for a hundred yards or so, and then paused to get his breath.

"You infernal man-hunter," he growled, between his set teeth, as he shook his fist in the direction from which he had come. "I have fooled you this time. You have no idea where I am, and you can chase all over New York if you like, without finding me."

Jim Daly would have presented a strange sight, if there had been anybody to look at him, or light enough to see him, in the tunnel. He wore a costume in which he had visited the ball, and over it a light overcoat that he had substituted for the cloak he had worn when first introduced to the reader, because the coat would not attract attention, while the cloak might have done so.

Brave and reckless as he was, he realized

that he had had a narrow escape from arrest, and, what was almost as bad, in his estimation, he had failed in his attempt upon the bank, that would have made him rich at one stroke, if he had been successful.

"Never mind," he muttered. "It is only put off for a short time. Can't expect everything to come my way, I suppose. Ha! What's that?"

His ear had caught the sound of a locomotive coming from the darkness along the tunnel, and the steady rumble told him that there was a train of cars behind it. At the same moment, he could discover a figure in the faint light at the end of the tunnel, standing on the track. That figure he recognized as that of Cool Bob Corden!

What should he do? The engine was coming along faster and faster and nearer and nearer. He ran a few steps toward the opening of the tunnel, but there stood the detective and although the detective had not seen the Serpent yet, in the darkness, Jim Daly knew that if he ran out, to avoid the engine, he would be in the hands of his enemy, and would stand little chance of escaping again.

Jim had taken too many risks in the course of a wild and adventurous life, to lose his wits altogether, in whatever position he might be placed, but he realized that his present predicament was a nasty one, and that it would require all his nerve and skill to escape with life and liberty.

Still the engine was bearing down upon him, and now the glare of the headlight, like the eye of an avenging monster, fell upon the track behind him, and showed him that it would be utterly impossible for him to pass it should it get to him.

And at the entrance of the tunnel stood the detective, like the incarnation of fate, waiting for him to be delivered into his hands!

He ran a few steps toward the detective, in an uncertain way, and then, with a smothered curse, ran the other way, in the direction of the engine.

The smoke and steam from the engine enveloped him, like the hot breath of a fiend, and made him gasp painfully. He squeezed himself tightly against the wall, for the engine was only a few yards away now. He shouted, but he might as well have spared himself the trouble, for no sound could be heard save the snorting and hissing of the iron power that was about to crush him. The engineer in his cab was sitting sideways, and was not even looking ahead.

There was no hope! The heat of the boiler sent a warm breath over his blanched features, and he knew that he was doomed!

Stay! There was one chance, and as the engine almost touched him, he took that one chance!

CHAPTER III.

A THUNDERBOLT.

Now to follow Morris Cohen and Kate Fairleigh after they had left Jim Daly to take young Walter Vantine in the cab.

Morris rubbed his hands stealthily as he saw the cab drive away; but, needless to say he did not know anything about the detective taking the liberty of riding on the back of the vehicle by the side of Barney Doran.

"Now, Kate, are you coming with me to the crib?" he asked, as the cab disappeared in the darkness.

"I don't care for your company," returned Kate, with a scornful flash of her dark eyes, "but I suppose I may as well go home, now that Jim is looking after that young fool himself."

"Certainly, my dear. You are a sensible girl, and I'll marry you some day. V'at a wife you vill make for an honest, hard-working man, Kate."

"I know an honest, hard-working man who'll get cracked over the head with a cobble-stone if he doesn't stop talking like a fool," returned Kate, significantly. "Shut up!"

The Jew saw that this was not likely to be an idle threat, and he did not address his fair companion again, until, after a ride on an Elevated train, they reached Baxter street, and found themselves in a small clothing store, where second-hand trowsers and coats were hung up in such profusion

that a stranger would be some time finding his way to the back door that led from the store into a small back room.

But Morris and Kate were not strangers, and Morris turned the handle of the front door, after unlocking it, and walked straight to the rear room, with Kate at his heels.

"V'at's going on here?" he demanded, in querulous tones. "V'at are you in the dark for?"

"V'at's that?" asked a voice out of the darkness, so much like his own that it sounded almost like an echo. "Would you want me to waste money by keeping the gas alight while I was sleeping, my tear son?"

"Quit your squawking, and light the gas!" answered Morris, shortly, as he stumbled against a chair and barked his shins.

At once a dim light pervaded the apartment as a small gas jet was lighted, revealing a skinny old woman, in ragged garments, but with diamonds glistening in her ears, while another of magnificent luster held her dress together at the throat.

"Any one been here?" demanded Morris, as he threw himself into a chair, and undutifully pitched his hat in the direction of his mother for her to hang up behind the door.

"No von, my tear son. Did you haf a good time at the ball, Morris, to-night? Did the girls all want to dance with you? Eh, Morris?"

"Who's below?" demanded Morris, ignoring his mother's inquiries, and giving the table a shove so that it nearly knocked the old woman over, while Kate stood surveying the two with ill-concealed disgust.

"They're all there, Morris, and I've had to tell them to keep quiet two or three times. They vill talk loud, and they vill sing, vonce in a while, and it von't do in a respectable house, you know."

The hag grinned as she said this, and Morris joined in her silent mirth, although not without a cautious glance in the direction of Kate, who was impatiently tapping her foot on the floor during these remarks.

"Now, Mother Rachel, do you want me any more, or can I go to bed?" she asked.

The old woman turned upon her in a perfect fury.

"You vill go to bed when I tells you, and you vill stay up when I tells you, and if I want to make you jump in the river, you vill do it, do you hear me?" spluttered Rachel, clinching her skinny fists and shaking them before the face of the girl.

"Hush, mother!" put in Morris.

"I von't hush," answered his mother. "I know what I know, and I am going to make that vicked hussy know her place, and I von't let her talk to me."

As she spoke, the hag flew at the girl, and seizing her by the throat, shook her in a perfect frenzy of rage, but rather as if she were satisfying some old grudge, than taking satisfaction for present annoyances or offenses.

The girl allowed herself to be pulled hither and thither, although no one could doubt that she could have crushed the old fury had she cared to do so, so far as actual physical strength was concerned. But there seemed to be some mysterious power exercised over her by the hag which restrained her, and made her submit to injuries and indignities without resistance, and almost without protest.

Old Rachel dragged the girl about, but it could easily be seen that the exertion was doing the beldam more harm than she was inflicting on her victim, and her dutiful son who recognized the fact, smiled with much enjoyment of the performance, without offering to interfere.

At last Mother Rachel stopped, breathless, and stood panting and glowering at the girl with an expression of deadly hate, while Kate regarded her with a questioning look, as if to ask her whether she had finished with her.

"Get out of my sight!" croaked the hag, at last, as soon as she could find her speech. "Go up-stairs, and stay there till I tells you to come out. If I catch you sneaking about the house, as I have on other nights, I'll—I'll burn you with a red-hot poker."

There was no doubt this was said in malignant earnest, although the ridiculous nature of the threat seemed to tickle Morris, and he laughed outright.

The girl did not reply, but opening a door

at the back of the room, which revealed a narrow, winding stairs, she disappeared, closing the door after her.

"I'd like to strangle her!" growled the old Jezebel. Then, turning to Morris, she continued: "Vell, my son, what news?"

"None. Jim Daly has young Vantine, and he vill bring him here after a vwhile. Then ve will introduce him to the gentlemen vhat ve have down-stairs, and see vhat ve can do toward making old man Vantine pay up vhat he owes us out of the bank. You stay here, mother, and tell Daly I'm here when he comes, and mind you don't make him mad, because he gets stubborn when he's not in a good humor, and that won't do now."

The old woman nodded, and then Morris went through the door into the store, looked around to see that everything was safe, and came back to the parlor, carefully locking the door as he did so. Then he went to the door leading to the staircase up which Kate Fairleigh had gone, listened for a moment, and bolted the door.

"That's right, my son. Always be careful," observed the old woman, approvingly.

Morris did not answer, but shoving the table away from the middle of the room, he pulled away a rug that lay there. Under the rug was the old carpet, that had been patched and mended so many times it was seamed in all directions. Morris thrust his fingers into a small, ragged hole, and gave the carpet a tug. A large section of it gave way in his hands, revealing a square opening, under which the dirty boards of the floor were shown. The carpet had been so ingeniously prepared, however, that no one would have suspected the seams which gave way were anything more than those made by repairing the old floor covering. It was evident, now, however, that the seams were there for a purpose other than appeared at a glance.

When he removed this portion of the carpet, faint sounds of voices and laughter could be heard by listening intently, and Morris Cohen's brow grew dark as he heard them.

"Mother, I thought you said you vas keeping them quiet. My! I could hear them people a block away, without listening. I'll soon stop them when I go down there."

He placed his finger carefully on the head of a rusty nail that was almost undiscernible under the layers of dirt, and a sharp click told that the nail governed a lock of some kind.

A vigorous stamp on the floor with the heel of his shoe caused a section of the floor to give way, dropping down on hinges, and a hole three feet square, perfectly black and dark, was revealed.

"Look out, mother."

"I vill, my son."

Morris slipped into the hole, and dropped out of sight; then the trap closed with a muffled bang, and the old woman was alone.

Morris did not drop very far—about six feet—upon a pile of sawdust. It was pitch dark, but that did not trouble him. He knew the place.

The voices he had heard faintly up-stairs were now very distinct, and the Jew frowned as he heard them.

"When they make one job pay pretty vell, those fellows have no sense at all," he muttered. "They must have vhat they call a good time, and act as if they vant to bring the police down on them. I'll give some of them up, and perhaps that vill be a warning to the rest."

He groped his way along some distance, until stopped by a door, on the outer side of which he could hear the talking still going on, although in softer tones than at first.

He tapped softly, but there was no response. Then he tapped a little louder, and the silence that followed assured him that his signal had been heard, and that some one was reconnoitering.

A thin shaft of light fell full upon his face for a moment and then disappeared. The Jew grinned.

"They didn't expect to see me, I guess, and they are getting all the things out of the way before they open the door," was his inward comment. "Vell, if they think they can fool Morris Cohen they are very much mistaken. I vas on to their tricks."

The door was opened a little way, allowing a stream of light to come forth, and Morris slipped through the opening and closed the door behind him, as he stood contemplating the company.

It was a motley crowd, and if the police had happened to drop in at that moment there would have been several arrests of people who bore the stamp of "suspicious characters" in every lineament of their faces, and every wrinkle of their flashy clothes.

Sitting at a table, on which were a loaf of bread, a ham, and several cups and saucers, with other etceteras of a meal, were a man and a boy. The man was a tough of the regulation New York type. He wore a plaid suit and a soft hat that came low over his forehead and partly obscured his right eye that bore traces of a scrap in the shape of a large bruise. On his little finger was a heavy gold ring, perfectly plain, and evidently worn more for use than ornament, since it was the sort of thing that would be a dangerous weapon on the hand of a man who was able and willing to use his fists on occasion. He had a short, turned-up nose, that had been broken across the bridge at some period of his career, and a scrubby, black mustache hid his upper lip and added to the sinister expression of his face.

The boy was a diminutive youngster of perhaps sixteen years of age, but with knowledge of the evil ways of the great city that might have belonged to a man of sixty, who had lived all his life amid the shady byways of Gotham.

"Well, blow me tight, if here ain't the old mug himself!" exclaimed the boy, as the Jew entered the room. "Billy, put a chair for the gentleman, and pour out another cup of coffee for him! It ain't often we has such good company. How are you, Morris, old man?"

He put out his small but dirty hand, and shook the claw of the Jew with effusive welcome, much to the embarrassment of Morris, who was anxious to deliver a lecture on the noise he had heard as he came down the hole.

"Stow yer blab, will yer, Snipe? You 'ave too much to say for a kid," was the gruff retort of the tough he had called Billy, and who was called by his friends "Billy the Bowler," being a twist of his real name, Billy Bowles.

"You are right, Billy, my dear," acquiesced Morris. "And while ve are talking about blab, let me tell you that you all have too much to say down here. When I agreed to let you people make my house your headquarters, I told you I must not have any row, and I don't mean to have it, either. And another thing, I won't have any card-playing down here."

"Why not?"

"Because you can't play a gentleman's game, and when either of you win or lose, you have to get into a scrap about it, and there is a chance that some day the police will hear you, and they vill come down and grab all the stakes, and most of the players vill find their way into the Tombs, right away. That's vhy."

He lifted up a corner of the table-cloth and showed a pack of cards and a pile of poker chips, which had been hastily covered while he was waiting outside the door.

"Perhaps you thought I didn't know what was going on inside here?" observed the Jew, with a grin. "But you can't fool your uncle."

Billy the Bowler swept the poker chips into his hat, and carried them to a corner of the room where he pitched them down, but put the pack of cards into his pockets.

There were four other men in the room, but they had been lying on a pile of bedding in a distant corner of the room, without making any observations, although the Jew had no doubt that some of them, at least, had been taking part in the friendly game of poker that he had interrupted so uncereimoniously.

"That's right. Now, about this Vantine job," said the Jew. "Billy, are you ready to go to work to-night?"

"Yes."

"Ve may have to take Snipe with us. A boy is useful sometimes."

"You bet yer socks I'm right in it," put in the boy, who was called Guttersnipe, when his name was given in full, from th-

fact that he had been found in the gutter when a baby, but who was generally addressed as "Snipe" for short.

"Kids should be seen and not heard," observed Billy.

Snipe was about to make some rather sharp retort that might have led to a personal difficulty between him and Billy the Bowler, when the proceedings were interrupted by a loud banging at the door, so different from the customary guarded tap that every one in the room started.

"Dowse the glim!" whispered the Jew, and instantly the gas jet was turned low, and the room was in darkness.

Then the boy went to the door and producing a small lantern with a strong reflector placed it close to the door in a certain position, and took an observation of the person outside. There was a small opening in the door through which the streak of light was sent, and another one to which he applied his eye.

"Hully chee! If it ain't Sanders," exclaimed the boy, as he flung open the door, and admitted an old man, with long gray whiskers that almost covered his face, allowing only two sharp eyes to be seen.

"What's the guff?" asked the Jew.

"The Serpent's nabbed!" answered the old man, shortly, and sunk into a chair in front of the stove, with his back to the gas, that had already been turned up again.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

WHEN the Serpent found the engine almost upon him in the Fourth avenue tunnel, he knew that he must act quickly, if he was to be saved from being crushed under the remorseless wheels.

As has already been intimated, he was a man of great strength and activity, and his determination was on a par with his physical powers. In the course of his life he had been a locomotive engineer, and he knew the desperate chance he must undertake.

He could not hesitate, and just as the engine almost touched him he sprang from the ground and seized one of the iron posts that are to be noticed on most engines on either side of the boiler. It was a mere chance that he would reach it, but he did, and the next moment he was standing on the pilot, while the engineer, seeing that he was approaching the outlet of the tunnel, put on more steam, and sent his engine flying along at greatly increased speed.

The Serpent saw the detective standing back out of the way of the great machine, and a smile curled the lip of the crook as he noted the expression of disgust on the face of Cool Bob at being outwitted just when he thought he had his prey in hand.

The engineer had not noticed the man clinging to the pilot, but went on for a while at good speed. Then he slackened, and Jim Daly, watching his opportunity, leaped off the engine, and made his way as rapidly as possible to Broadway. Twenty minutes later he was standing at the corner of Broadway and Fifth avenue, gazing quietly at the tower of Madison Square Garden that could just be distinguished in the gloom, as if he were some stranger who had come to New York to see the sights, and who was looking at the great city at night, as part of his enjoyment.

"Fooled!" he muttered. "Had everything in my hands, and now I'm worse off than ever. I can't go to the crib, and confess that I, Jim Daly, the Serpent, have been trapped like a new hand, and that I have been made a fool of by that cursed Twister. Well, I got away from him, anyhow, and I don't think he will catch me again in a hurry."

He lighted a cigar and walked quietly up Broadway till he reached the Coleman House, where he went in, with his coat buttoned up closely around him, asked the clerk for his key, said "Good-night," and made his way up to his room.

Jim Daly always made it a boast that he kept his business to himself, and at the Coleman House he passed for a California business man, who had a taste for theatricals, and liked to be among theatrical people. The Coleman House is known as one

of the favorite hotels, and there are so many people passing in and out and chatting in the office of the hotel, that a stranger is not likely to attract as much attention as would be the case in a quieter and less frequented house.

All these things Jim Daly knew, and he had been living at the Coleman for nearly a month, without any one troubling themselves about his goings or comings, and without his being suspected for anything other than what he represented himself to be.

On reaching his room he undressed and went to bed, where he fell asleep as peacefully as a child, his adventures of the night having no power to interfere with his rest, or apparently causing him any uneasiness.

While the Serpent was sleeping at his hotel, there was an altogether different scene in progress at the bank of which Alexander Vantine was president.

Peter, the watchman, who had been released from his bonds by the detective before he started in pursuit of the Serpent, was talking excitedly to a tall, stern-looking man, with iron-gray whiskers and a judicial aspect, in the small room by the side of the vault, while Walter Vantine still lay asleep on the sofa.

"You say my son appears to have been drugged, eh, Peter?" queried the stern-looking man, as he shook Walter.

"Yes, Mr. Vantine. He came in here, and talked wildly, and threw himself on the sofa. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor, with a rope around me, and before I realized the situation, I was being released by another man, who chased after the first, and left me."

"And then?"

"Then I pulled the electric alarm that goes into your house, and tried to wake up Mr. Walter."

"Um! A mysterious thing all around," muttered the banker, as he shook his son more vigorously than ever, and this time with some success, for the young man moved uneasily, and when he had been shaken again, opened his eyes and looked, with a dazed expression, into the eyes of his father.

"What are you doing here, Walter?" demanded his father.

Walter sat up on the sofa and looked from his father to Peter, and back again, but evidently without remembering anything that had taken place.

"What does this mean?" continued the banker, as he shook his son until his teeth chattered.

But he might as well have interrogated the statue of liberty in New York harbor. The drug that had been given to the young fellow had totally destroyed his memory of the events of the night, and he could only look helplessly into his father's face and shake his head. He did not know how he had come into the bank, or even that he was there. He was not a responsible agent, for the time being.

"Call a cab, Peter."

"Must not leave the bank, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"My orders from you are that I am not to go out of the bank until the cashier comes, at any time, even if you yourself ordered me to do so. That is your own rule, sir, and I cannot break through it."

The banker frowned for an instant; then he clapped the watchman on the shoulder, and said, approvingly.

"You are right, Peter. I wish every one in my employ were as trustworthy as you. I will get the cab myself. Stay here and watch Walter."

Alexander Vantine marched out of the bank, as unbending as a Sphinx, and with nothing in his countenance to reveal his thoughts or opinions of the extraordinary proceedings that had brought him from bed at this unusual hour. He was strictly a man of business, and he was as methodical as a well-regulated machine. This adventure was something unprecedented in his experience, but he did not let it be seen that it disturbed him in the least. It was this habit of keeping himself thoroughly in control that had led to his growing from a poor, friendless boy, half a century before, into the wealthy and influential banker of to-day.

Alexander Vantine had to walk to Broad-

way before he found a cab, and then he caught one "on the fly," as it were, for the driver was bowling along up Broadway with the directness of purpose that could only mean that he was through for the night. The banker's hail brought him to a halt, however.

"Cab!" cried the banker.

"Oi hear yez, bad 'cess ter yez!" growled the driver, sotto voce. Then, raising his voice, he responded: "Is it a cab yez want?"

"Do you suppose I want a ferry-boat?" retorted Alexander Vantine, rather petulantly.

"Ow! Be me sowl, he's funny, ain't he?" muttered the driver. "Oi wonder if it 'ud hurt him if Oi wor ter let the wheel go down a hole somewhere, and give him a shaking-up. Be jabbers, Oi'll do it if he don't moind himself."

Grumbling thus, the cabman drew his vehicle to the curb and the banker stood for a moment, before getting in, to give him directions.

"Vantine's bank," he said, briefly.

"Phwat's that?" asked the driver, with a start.

"I thought I spoke plainly. I said Vantine's bank, Fourth avenue. Do you know where it is?"

"Oi do thot."

"Then drive there right away," answered the banker, calmly, as he entered the cab.

"Well, be the powers, things be gettin' hot," was the muttered comment of the driver, who was none other than Barney Doran. "Here Oi had the young man an hour ago, and the Serpent and Cool Bob, the Twister, all in my cab at one toime. Then Oi lost them all, and now Oi have the ould fellow. Be jabbers, Oi shouldn't wonder if Oi was to meet the divil himself before Oi git through wid this noight's work. Oi took Cool Bob down-town just now, but what for Oi don't know. He only tould me to drive down to the post-office, and whin Oi asked him whether he was going to mail some letters, he tould me to moind my own business, or Oi should never do for the foorce. Then he paid me double me fare, and tould me not to say anything to nobody about what Oi'd seen to-noight. Begorra, Oi should like to know what it all means. But Oi suppose Oi must wait till Oi get on the foorce and become a detective myself, like Cool—I m'ane Captain Corden—before Oi shall know anything about it."

Although Barney Doran's mind was busy he was driving along mechanically in the direction of the bank, he being so used to handling the reins that he would probably have gone along all right if he had been fast asleep.

Just as he got to this point in his cogitations however, he had reached the corner of Fourth avenue and Twenty-eight street, where it will be remembered some building operations were in progress, and where he had had a controversy with an ashman some time before. Bricks and rubbish were scattered about the road, and now one of the wheels of the cab ran over a small pile of bricks and gave the cab a lurch that almost shot the banker out headfirst.

"I beg your pardon, sorr," cried Barney, through the trap in the roof of the cab. "Oi hope as you was not hurt, sorr."

"I hope you are sober," was the only reply of the banker, as he settled himself back in his seat.

"Oi hope Oi am, but be the powers, Oi'm not sure about it, though Oi haven't tasted liquor since Oi shwore aff two years ago."

He drove up the avenue until he reached the bank, and drew up his horse with a clatter that was very imposing, and quite worthy of a driver of a swell turnout.

"Well, Oi'll see this thing through now, at all events," muttered Barney, as he threw open the doors of his cab, for the banker to alight.

The banker deliberately took out his pocket-book and asked Barney Doran his fare.

"A dollar and a half," answered Barney mechanically.

"Your fare is exactly a dollar," remarked the banker, as he took a note-book from his pocket, and copied the number of the cab into the book. "Here is your dollar."

Your number is 777, and you will hear from me again for trying to overcharge."

Alexander Vantine coolly replaced his pocket-book and note-book in their respective pockets, while Barney stood holding the dollar in his hand in silent admiration of the calmness of the banker, and too much surprised to utter a word of protest, although he knew that he was right, because the banker had not allowed for the fact that cabmen were permitted to charge night rates at four o'clock in the morning.

The banker walked deliberately up the steps of the bank, Barney watching him as he disappeared through the partly-opened doorway.

"Oi never heard of a bank being left that way, wid the door open, at this time in the day," thought Barney.

He had hardly had time to make this unuttered comment, when the banker appeared at the top of the iron steps and beckoned to him. He responded to the motion by going up and following Mr. Vantine into the bank.

Everything was just as he had left it a short time before, except that there was not a sign of human life about. *Peter the watchman, and his son, Walter Vantine, had vanished!*

CHAPTER V.

A FOUL BLOW.

For at least a minute the banker stood looking into the face of Barney Doran with a mystified expression that was as near excitement as the cab-driver supposed ever came into the face of the calm, cool man who seemed to be the victim of a series of extraordinary happenings on this night.

"What's the matter, sorr?" asked Barney, at last.

The expression on the face of the banker changed from one of confusion to one of recognition.

"Your name is Barney Doran, is it not?"

"Begorra, you're roight, but how did yez foind it out?" answered Barney.

"Never mind. I know you, and I can trust you. I will not say anything about your trying to overcharge me for the cab."

He took out his notebook as he spoke, and crossed off an entry he had made with reference to the dollar and a half. Then he smiled, in a dignified way, and held out his hand, which Barney took in his own, without having the least idea what it all meant.

"Can you give a little time to my service, if I pay you well?" asked the banker.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Barney, cautiously.

"Some detective work."

"Detective work, is it?" repeated Barney, while a flush of pleasure suffused his cheeks.

"Yes."

"Oi'm yer man!"

"Yes, I believe you are."

"When am Oi ter begin?"

"Now."

"Oi'm wid yez!"

"But, your cab! You must get rid of that."

"Oi'll drive up to the stable roight away, an' be back ag'in in a short time."

"Wait a minute, and I will go with you."

"All right."

"Do you know a certain man, of shady reputation, known as the Serpent, but whose real name is Jim Daly?"

Barney Doran started, guiltily.

"I see you do," went on the banker, calmly. "When did you see him last?"

Barney was afraid of the mysterious banker, who seemed to have knowledge that one would not have expected to find in the possession of so quiet and respectable a member of society.

"I asked you when you saw him last?" repeated the banker, as Barney hesitated.

"Oi'll tell you the whole truth," blurted out Barney, at last.

"You'd better, I think," was the quiet response.

"Oi was down at the Academy of Music last night, wid me cab, hoping ter get a good fare—"

"What do you mean by a 'good' fare?" interrupted Mr. Vantine.

"A man who would not be particular about what Oi charged him."

"So I supposed. Well?"

"Oi was engaged by a little hump backed feller, a sheeny, who gave me a dollar, and tould me to wait around the Academy till Oi saw him again. He had some friends inside, he said, who had a jag on, and he wanted them taken home as soon as he could get them out of the ball."

"Ah!"

"Well, Oi waited as Oi was tould, an' sure enough, pretty late, out come the Serpent wid the Jew, an' then a girl showed up wid a young feller who was purty full."

"Yes?"

"The Serpent and the young feller got into the cab and Oi drove them up to the corner of Twenty-eighth street, and then Oi lost them both, as well as—"

"As well as what?"

Barney stammered and hesitated, but the banker repeated his question, and Doran found himself telling all he knew—about the detective as well as the Serpent and the young fellow."

The banker remained lost in thought for a moment. Then his countenance cleared, as he saw his way out of the maze in which he had been lost for the last hour.

"Help me search this building thoroughly, and then I will go with you to take your cab home," he said.

The two men went through the bank, looking in every corner, to make sure that there was no one concealed about the premises. The banker looked at the vault door, and assured himself that it had not been tampered with, and that the treasure it contained had been undisturbed since it had been put there the day before when the bank was closed by the cashier.

Then he went to the door and beckoned to an officer who chanced to be passing, and who knew him very well.

"My watchman is not here this morning, and I want you to keep your eye on the bank," explained the banker. "When you are relieved, tell the day man to do the same thing until opening time."

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Mr. Vantine," said the officer, anxiously, for robbery of the bank would be a serious reflection upon him, his beat covering the particular locality in which the bank was situated.

"Nothing wrong, so far. And there won't be, if you will do what I ask."

"Of course I will, Mr. Vantine."

The banker was an important man, and the officer knew that it was necessary for the safety of his own position that there should be no complaints about him from such a quarter.

Alexander Vantine came out, with Barney Doran, fastened the door, and, getting into the cab, told Barney to drive to the stable, but without giving him any inkling of what was to be the next move.

Barney drove rapidly toward Sixth avenue and Thirty-second street, near which point the stable was situated, and the banker kept his eyes open, more from habit than anything else, for he did not expect to gain any information that would assist him in his search for his son by looking out of the window of the cab.

It was still dark, although the large street arc lights shed a useful illumination upon most of the thoroughfares through which they passed. The cab crossed Broadway at Thirty-fifth street, and turned into Sixth avenue at its junction with Broadway. As it passed under the "L" tracks a woman ran to the horse's head and grasped the bridle with such force and so suddenly as to throw him back upon his haunches, at the same time almost hurling Barney over the roof of the cab head-first.

"Bad 'cess to yez! What be yez doing?" demanded Barney, indignantly.

The woman took no notice of him, but springing upon the step of the cab at the side, looked Alexander Vantine full in the face.

"You are Mr. Vantine?" she demanded, breathlessly.

The banker did not appear surprised, but answered in his usual calm tones:

"That is my name. What do you want?"

The woman pressed her hand to her heart and gasped. She was evidently exhausted by running. The banker waited impassive-

ly until she should recover sufficiently to speak, while Barney leaned over the roof of the cab and watched.

"My name is Kate Fairleigh," she said, at last.

"Be gob! It's the woman that Oi saw down at the Academy," muttered Barney. "Be me sowl! Here's more of it!"

"Well," observed the banker, "who is Kate Fairleigh?"

"I know something about your son."

Barney strained his ears to catch all that passed, in a state of intense excitement, but Alexander Vantine did not betray any more interest than if the girl had been talking about a total stranger.

"What about my son?"

"I can tell you where he is."

"Where is he?"

"I dare not speak the name of the place. It would be as much as my life is worth."

"Pooh! We are in New York. This is a civilized city, with the finest police force in the world, and detectives on every corner almost."

The banker calmly blew his nose, and lay back in his seat, while waiting for his strange companion to go on.

"I know we are in New York," she returned, hurriedly, "and that is why I dare not speak. The wolves are always ready to pounce upon any one who will reveal their hiding-place, and they would kill me with as little compunction as a real wolf would tear a lamb to pieces. But I will take you to the place, if you will let me ride with you in the cab, and then, if they find me out, let them. My life is not worth anything to me, now."

The banker made room for the girl to sit beside him, and asked, briefly: "Which way?"

"Right down Broadway."

"Drive down Broadway, Barney," directed Mr. Vantine, to Barney, through the trap in the roof.

"All roight, sorr!" Adding softly to himself: "But, begorra, Oi don't like to work the horse so hard. It's toime he was going to his stable, so it is, instead of making him run another three or four miles. But Oi'm bound to see this thing through now."

He whipped up his weary horse, and the cab went down Broadway at a good pace.

The banker did not address his companion again, and she did not volunteer any information. The two sat perfectly still in the cab, while Barney drove along, wondering how far he had to go.

At last they reached Union Square, and Kate called up to Barney:

"Turn into Fourth avenue, and down the Bowery."

Suddenly she signaled to him to stop, and the next instant she had sprung from the cab, and, pointing to a cheap hotel, on the corner of a street, whispered to Alexander Vantine:

"Go in there and engage a room for yourself, under the name of William Alexander. Then go into the reading-room and watch."

"What shall I see?"

"Something that will help you to find out where your son is. Wait till you learn something, or until you see me again."

The banker did not stop to argue the point with the girl. In fact, he had no chance to do so, for she had gone as soon as she uttered the last word, and the banker, astute as he was, could not understand how she had managed to disappear without leaving a trace of herself behind.

"Barney?"

"Yis, sorr."

"I shall not go into the hotel."

"Won't yez, sorr?"

"No."

"Why not, sorr?"

"Because I know where my boy is, and I am going there, instead."

"You think that girl was fooling yez, then? Begorra, Oi suspected as much, me-self."

"Did you? Then I'm afraid you are an ass, Barney. The girl is sincere enough. But she is afraid some of those rascals that seem to have her in their power are on the watch, and I dare say they are. Come with me."

"Wid the cab?"

"No. We must get rid of that. There is a livery stable down that street. Take the cab there, for the night. Here is my

card. They know me there. Tell them I will be responsible for the payment of the livery bill."

"All right, sorr. But Oi don't think that is necessary when they will have the horse and cab for security for the bit the cr'ature will eat and the bed he will slape on."

"Do as I tell you. They may think you have stolen the rig."

Barney did not say anything more, but mounted to his seat, and prepared to drive away, but stopped himself.

"Where will you be, sorr, when I come back?"

"I will remain here."

"All roight, sorr. I won't be more than ten minutes."

Barney drove rapidly to the livery-stable, and after some parleying with the sleepy night hostler, who did not want to be bothered, arranged for the disposal of the horse and cab till he should return for them, explaining that he had a fare down this end of town, and as he lived in the neighborhood, he did not want to take the cab up to the regular stable, at Sixth avenue and Thirty-second street.

"Take care of him," was Barney's last remark, as he walked briskly away, down to the corner on the Bowery, where he had left the banker.

"Phwere the dickens is he?" muttered Barney, as he looked about, but could not see anything of Mr. Vantine. There's plenty of light about here. He can't be far away, and Oi ought to be able to see him."

He walked up and down, peered into the doorways, went across the street, and back again, searching in every nook and corner for at least a quarter of an hour.

The banker had gone!

"Well, if that ain't a dirty trick to play on a man as was trying to do the square thing!" observed Barney, to himself, in a tone expressive of injury as well as disgust. "Oi never thought he would do it. Be gob, Oi ain't much of a detective, after all, when Oi'll let a man get away from me loike that. Oi'd better stick to me cab-driving, Oi'm thinking."

He walked up and down for a few minutes longer, hoping against hope that he would catch a glimpse of the banker, but every moment feeling more and more sure that that calm, inscrutable gentleman had given him the slip, for some purpose of his own.

He had just reached this conclusion when, suddenly, something came crashing upon the back of his head, and he knew no more.

"You shouldn't try to do things that you do not know anything about, my tear!" said a snuffing voice that Barney would have recognized as that of Morris Cohen, had he been in a condition to recognize anything, as that worthy patted a handy-billy that he carried in his right hand and with which he had dealt poor Barney Doran the blow that had knocked him senseless.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAPPING THE FOE.

THE effect of the declaration of the old man in the secret room under the Baxter street clothing store, that the Serpent was caught, was almost electrical.

Everybody in the room crowded around the old man whom the boy had called Sanders, and demanded to know how it had been accomplished.

"How do you think?" snuffled Sanders! "Who is it that is always interfering with our business, eh? Who was it sent me up to Sing Sing for five years for a job as I wasn't in, eh?" he demanded, looking so fiercely at Morris that that amiable gentleman turned up his eyes in pious deprecation. "Who was it? You all know. Speak his name?"

"Captain Bob, the Twister," screamed the Jew, in a sudden rage. "Yes, it was always him."

"But I'll get my fingers at his throat some day, the blooming cuss! An' when I do, I'll twist him!" exclaimed Billy the Bowler. "Why, burn my body! Ever since I come over 'ere from dear old Lunnion, to do a little business in a gentlemanly way, 'e 'as been a-chasin' of me. But I'll choke 'im to death when I do get my 'ands on 'im!"

"Will you now?" said Sanders, with his usual snuffle. "You are a good boy, Billy, and an ornament to your profession."

"But v'at about the Serpent?" interrupted Morris, impatiently. "How vas he caught?"

"At Vantine's bank."

"At Vantine's bank?" echoed Billy the Bowler and the Jew, in chorus.

"Yes. He was in the bank, with young Vantine, but the scheme he was playing did not work very well, because, it seems, Cool Bob had got wind of the job in some way, and the next thing the Serpent knew, he was wearing a pair of handcuffs and on his way to the nearest police station."

"How did you learn all this?" asked the Jew, looking at Sanders with keen eyes in which there was a good deal of the suspicion habitual to him. "When did you come down from the river?"

"From Sing Sing?"

"Yns."

"Yesterday. I did not expect to get out for another week, but I must have made a mistake in figuring up my time for conduct in the pen, for they let me out yesterday, and I was just in time to get on to the Twister's little game."

"But you couldn't block it."

"No. I don't think there is any one in this room that could do it either," returned Sanders, as he made his way to the back of the stove, and rudely shoving one of the slumbering men aside, took a shovelful of coal from a box and threw it into the stove.

As he did so, the glare of the fire fell full upon his face, and Morris Cohen, who happened to be looking at him, started, and then smiled, as if a foolish thought had crossed his mind, and instantly been dismissed as unworthy of being entertained.

What that thought was may be revealed before very long.

"Well, what the bloomin'dickens are we goin' ter do?" said Billy. "We can't let the Serpent reman in the hands of the cops, can we?"

"How are ve to get him out?" responded the Jew. "Talk sense, my tear. Do you vant to go up to the station an' tell them he vas a friend of yours, eh? If you do, go right away, an' see v'at they will say to you."

Billy the Bowler hung his head under this rebuke, and then lighting a very strong brier-root pipe, puffed away in silence, making the Jew cough violently before he was able to speak again. When he had recovered, which he did with a great deal of wheezing and with his eyes full of tears, he said, decisively:

"Some one must go to the bank, and look around, and try to find what has become of young Vantine. Who will go?"

"I will!" volunteered Billy the Bowler, promptly.

"Yes, you would make a nice fist of it. You would go scrapping with whoever you might find there, and be taken to the police station to keep the Serpent company. No, no, Billy. You are all right for a knock-about job, where it is necessary to slug somebody into obedience, but you vas no good for fine work."

"P'raps you're right, Morris," acquiesced Billy, reluctantly. "I can't do things in the snaky sort o' way that you can. It seems to me, then, that you is the only one that can go."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders in modest self-depreciation, but at last agreed that he would undertake the job of finding out just how the land lay, and would, if possible, bring young Walter Vantine back with him.

"And I'll take Snipe with me."

"All right, Morris. I've been asleep all the night, and I'm in shape for anything," observed Guttersnipe, cheerfully.

"I don't care v'ether you've had sleep or not," croaked Morris. "When there is work for you to do, you *must* do it, no matter how you feel. Mind that, my tear."

The Jew opened the door, but before he went out, took a cup of coffee out of the coffee-pot that was steaming on the stove, and swallowed it in hasty gulps, Guttersnipe following his example, and also fortifying himself with a good drink of the strong liquid.

Billy the Bowler had thrown himself on a mattress in the corner, and was evidently in a doze. He had accustomed himself to snatch a few minutes of sleep at any time and under any circumstances, because the sort of life he led demanded that he should be operating at a time when respectable peo-

ple were in bed, and he was compelled to sleep when and how he could.

Through the open door there was nothing to be seen but darkness.

But—what was that, which seemed like a deeper shadow just outside the door, and then disappeared?

Old Sanders was hugging the stove, and yet, if one had watched him closely, they might have seen that those bright eyes of his, in the depths of the hair that covered his face, were restlessly peering about the room, and that they had noticed the mysterious shadow, although he did not make any remark.

The shadow appeared again, and this time a face came so close to the doorway that it could easily have been seen by any one whose face was turned in that direction. The old man may have failed to see the face, because he did not make any sign, and yet if he saw the shadow before, he could hardly have avoided noticing this face, or the eager glance around the room of the dark eyes belonging thereto.

It was the face of Kate Fairleigh!

For an instant she looked about the room, and then, softly and swiftly, she passed inside, and went to a screen that stood in the shadow in a corner of the apartment opposite to that in which the slumberers were now snoring in concert.

Sanders's eyes followed her to her hiding-place, and yet, strange to say, did not make any observation.

"That will do. I feel like a new man now," said the Jew, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he put down his cup and prepared to go out.

"If you were a new man, you might be handsomer than you are," observed Snipe, irreverently. "But, bully chee! I think you are homelier than ever!"

Morris aimed a blow at him, which the lad dexterously dodged, and then ran out, followed by the Israelite, who closed the door after him while the spring lock shot into place.

Sanders arose from his seat by the stove and bolted the door. Then he stood for a moment, as if in thought.

He soon made up his mind what to do, however, for he walked over to the screen and seized the wrist of Kate Fairleigh with his right hand, while he placed his left over her mouth.

The girl struggled, but she was helpless in the grasp of the old man, weak as he looked.

"Don't speak a word!" he hissed, in her ear.

She shook her head as a sign that she would obey, and Sanders removed his hand from her mouth a little way, but was ready to clap it over her lips instantly if he saw any disposition on her part to cry out or to endeavor to attract the attention of the other inmates of the room, who were apparently all asleep.

"Why did you come down here?" he demanded.

"To see what was going on," she answered, in a sulky whisper.

"And then?"

"None of your business!"

Sanders looked her in the eyes, and, in spite of herself, her bold gaze fell before the searching glance of the old man.

"You were to bring Walter Vantine here to-night?"

"Yes, but Morris and the Serpent took the job out of my hands."

"Ah!"

There was a world of meaning in this brief exclamation, and the girl looked at him in surprise.

"Do you know anything about it? Morris Cohen came home without him, and the Serpent hasn't been around, and I don't know what shape the matter is in," she said, below her breath.

Sanders maintained his steady look upon her, and then he whispered in her ear, placing his hand quickly over her mouth to stop the cry of surprise that he saw was about to arise to her lips.

"That is all right," he muttered. "Now, you do as I tell you, and you may find it a good thing for you."

"But—"

"You want to know what you are to do? Well, you shall know in good time," he said,

with a wrinkle of his forehead and eyelids that suggested the possibility of his laughing under his whiskers.

The girl was about to make some response, when, suddenly, the screen was pulled down, and Billy the Bowler seized the girl by the shoulder and spun her around.

"Oho! So you have come down 'ere sneakin' an' tryin' to find out things what you 'adn't ought to know, 'ave yer?" exclaimed Billy, with a sinister grin. "Well, I'll knock yer bloomin' 'ead off. That's what I'll do."

He raised his ponderous fist, and would doubtless have carried out his threat, but for the interference of the old man, who seized him by the wrist and threw him to the floor, howling with pain, while Kate shrunk behind Sanders, as if she depended upon him for protection, old and feeble as he might well be supposed to be, judging from his appearance.

The Bowler was upon his feet in an instant, and rushed to the fray with a bellow of rage. He aimed a blow at the old man's face that would have sent him spinning to the other end of the room if it had taken effect. But, Sanders was not to be caught that way. He sprang aside with an agility wonderful for an old man, and at the same time planted his left fist on Billy's face with a force that threatened to blacken the other eye.

"'Ello! So you've l'arned to use yer dukes while you were up at Sing Sing, 'ave yer?" spluttered the Bowler, as he came forward again, with more caution than he had displayed hitherto. "Well, come on, an' 'ave a mill, an' I'll make yer awfully sick, my covey!"

Billy the Bowler was an adept in boxing, and perhaps he would not have received the blow in the eye from Sanders without making an instant reprisal had he not been taken by surprise.

He never knew Sanders to display such skill with his fists before and he was not expecting any resistance from the old man.

Sanders did not speak, but he had his hands up in the regulation boxing attitude, and did not evince the least fear at the Bowler's valiant defiance.

When the young man advanced and after a little sparring, during which he danced about on his toes like a male ballet-dancer, made a lunge at him, Sanders returned quickly—or, as sporting writers, say "countered"—on his mouth, with a force that made his teeth rattle and cut his upper lip badly. Then the two men went at each other hammer-and-tongs, and there was enough excitement to have brought the police down upon them had they not been well out of hearing of the street.

How the battle might have ended cannot be said positively, for the noise awoke the men who had been sleeping on the bedding in the other corner of the room, and, just as Sanders was about to plant a vigorous "upper-cut" on the point of the Bowler's jaw, he was seized from behind by two others and held so that he could not free himself.

At the same moment Billy avenged himself for several ugly blows that had been dealt him by his antagonist, by giving Sanders a ringing slap on the cheek with his open hand that disarranged the gray whiskers, and made Billy open his eyes.

He saw that the whiskers were false, and ere Kate Fairleigh could stop him—which she tried to do—he had snatched them from the face of the old man, and revealed the fact that the supposed Sanders was—"Cool Bob, the Twister," the dreaded detective!

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE TWIST

"Oh! 'ere's luck!" cried Billy the Bowler, joyously. "Got the fox right in the trap! Well, if this ain't the rummest go I ever seen! 'Old him tight, fellers, while I go through 'im. Who'd 'a' thought as 'e would 'a' been sich a fool!"

Billy fairly danced with glee, as he thrust his hands into the detective's pockets one after the other, and placed the contents upon the table. A six-shooter, a pair of handcuffs, a pocketbook well supplied with bills, a pocket-knife, and a few other articles, were all that the pockets of Cool Bob contained. There was no note-book, as Billy

hoped there would be, to give a clue to certain plans that the detective might be following to catch the crooks, and in fact there was not a scrap of writing of any kind about his person.

The detective did not make any remark while the men were searching him, and if he was chagrined, he did not show it by word or look. He was as perfectly cool as might have been expected of a man who was known to every thief in the city of New York as a man whom nothing could disturb.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked one of the men, a low-browed fellow, who rejoiced in the cognomen of Ikey Bill.

"Shove 'im in the cellar till Morris comes 'back, of course."

"All right!"

"Suppose you put them bracelets on 'is 'ands. It will make 'im feel more comfortable like," suggested Billy.

Ikey Bill, with a grin of malignant triumph, forced the detective's hands together behind him, and slipped on the handcuffs with an ominous click, so that Cool Bob was absolutely helpless.

Just as this operation was performed, Billy heard a noise at the door, and saw that Kate Fairleigh had slipped back the bolts, and was in the act of opening the spring lock. He sprung to her side, and caught her before she could get through, as was evidently her intention.

"No yer don't, my pretty donah! I'm a-watchin' yer. You've tried it at the wrong time."

As he spoke he gave her a brutal wrench that threw her to the floor. But she was up in an instant, and fastening her ten nails in the Bowler's face, scored it down, so that it was covered with blood. He struck at her wildly, but she darted away from him, and, picking up the big iron poker, threatened to brain him if he came within reach.

"What a wild-cat she is!" growled Billy. "But, never mind. Keep watch over that there door," he commanded one of the men who had not yet taken an active part in the struggle with the detective. "I'll attend to 'er case afterward."

The detective had watched this episode with Kate Fairleigh with a curious smile, as if he were amused, without caring what might be done to him. He was in a tight place, and he knew it, but it was not his nature to feel apprehensive, and he was as calm now as if he were in his office at Police Headquarters, with fifty stout officers within call to help him in case he needed assistance.

"Open the door," ordered Billy, briefly, and Ikey Bill, moving the stove, in such a manner that the stove-pipe was not displaced, but so that the space under the stove was made quite clear, pushed aside the square of zinc, that appeared to be nailed to the floor, but wasn't, pulled up a trap by means of a small iron ring imbedded in the wood, and so caked over with dirt that it would hardly have been noticed by a stranger.

The detective appeared to be very much interested in this arrangement, and the Bowler evidently knew what was passing in his mind, for he said, with a grin.

"You think you are l'arning all about the crib, don't yer, Twister? So you are, but it ain't a-goin' to do yer any good, for I don't think you will 'ave a chance to do any more detective work in this world, smart as you think you are."

"Think not?" observed the detective, quietly. "We cannot always tell, you know."

"Yes, we can—this time, any'ow. Now, boys, down with him!"

When the trap was lifted up it did not reveal a hole, as might have been expected, but another floor, apparently, there being only the thickness of the joists of the upper floor to the boards below. It was hard to understand at first what could be the object in having a trap here at all, when there was nothing below but this second floor.

The detective was soon shown what it meant, however, for he was forced to stand on the false flooring in the trap, and then, swift as the wind, he was dropped out of sight. The second flooring was a trap on pulleys, like those used in the stages of theaters, and when his weight pressed upon it, it went down with him.

No sooner was his head below the level of the upper floor than the trap closed over him and he was in pitchy darkness.

It would be impossible to conceive a more helpless position than that in which the detective found himself now. His hands were fastened behind him, and he was dropping he knew not where. He could not judge with any certainty how far he had been sent down, but he was sure the pit, or cellar, was a considerable distance below the underground kitchen.

The trap stopped with a suddenness that made him step off it involuntarily, and then he heard it sliding up and rattling against the floor far over his head.

For a moment he stood quite still, to try and collect his thoughts. Accustomed to all sorts of uncanny adventures as he was, Cool Bob was obliged to admit to himself that he was in a very bad fix this time. In one of the worst quarters of New York, and far underground, with his hands fastened behind him in a pair of steel handcuffs, what hope had he of ever getting out alive. He knew too well that he could not expect any mercy from the band that had him in their power. Every member of it had reason to fear him, and now that this outrage had been visited upon him, they knew that he would hunt them down relentlessly, and that they would spend a large portion of their lives in the Penitentiary if he were ever permitted to see the free sunlight again.

All these reflections passed quickly through the detective's brain and made him set his wits to work for some plan by which he could baffle them. He knew that not one of them would be equal to him single-handed, but it was hard for him to fight against such strong odds as faced him now.

The first thing to be done was to find out where he was, and whether there could be any outlet from his prison besides that above. So he walked as straight as he could in one direction, but slowly and cautiously. He noticed that there was a damp smell more pronounced than would exist in an ordinary cellar, and he was not surprised when he suddenly found himself walking in about a foot of water.

"Sewage," he muttered.

A few steps further, and he stumbled over a large round object, that he recognized as a sewer-pipe. He met the obstruction with force enough to throw him over it head-first, and he had the pleasure of finding his face in a deep puddle of what he could tell, by the taste and smell, was very dirty water. It was not easy for him to pick himself up, hampered as he was by the handcuffs, but he was lithe and active, and he accomplished the feat after a few ineffectual efforts.

He found that there was a brick wall just before him, his face coming into contact with the cold and slimy bricks, and he began to have a pretty clear idea of where he was.

The knowledge did not give him much pleasure, however, for he recognized the fact that there was very little hope of escape from his prison. He moved about for nearly half an hour, before he was able to estimate that he was in a cellar about twelve feet square, and that one of the big sewer mains passed through it. What the cellar had been used for originally he could not tell, but he easily understood that it made a very convenient place for the hiding of stolen property, and that the excellent gentlemen over his head were accustomed to apply it to that purpose.

Having decided where he was, he had time to think about what should be his next move. He had no intention of remaining inactive, even if nothing could come of his trying to escape. He must have the satisfaction of knowing that he had done all that was possible to a man before he submitted to his enemies.

He thought hard for a few moments, and then he made his way over to the spot where he had walked into the water, and where a faint trickling sound struck his ear.

The water was evidently somewhere. Where was it running to and where did it come from?

He asked himself this question, and it was not long before he could answer it. Feeling along the great iron sewer-pipe with his elbow and knee, whichever he found most convenient, he discovered that the iron pipe had been eaten away with rust at one spot,

and that the water was escaping from the opening in a steady stream.

Gauging the spot carefully, he placed his heel against the pipe by the side of the opening, and pushed with all his force. As he had hoped, his heel broke off a large piece of rusty iron, and the hole was widened considerably. The iron was almost thin as cardboard at that point, and it would not require much force to break away a great deal more of it.

Cool Bob smiled as a new hope sprung up in his breast, and he plied his heel to the iron with redoubled energy, sending another section of the pipe out of place.

"So far, good," he exclaimed, with a chuckle. "But I cannot go any further with these things on my wrists. I must try how far my nickname of the Twister is deserved."

Cool Bob knew all about the handcuffs he wore. They were his own, and he had used them on many a desperate criminal, without any fear of their giving way. But now he was just as anxious to prove them weak as generally he had been to find that they could not be defied.

He tried, first to slip his hands through them, and if they had been put on at all loosely he might have succeeded in this attempt, for his hands were supple and small, and the knuckles were very little larger around than his wrists. But they were a little larger, and as the handcuffs had been drawn so tightly around his wrists as almost to cut into the flesh, the little difference was just enough to prevent his slipping out of them.

"No use trying that!" was his decision, after about five minutes of struggling, during which he cut his hands painfully, without making the handcuffs give way in the least. "I must try the twist."

As has been said, he possessed great strength in his hands, and had a way of twisting people's hands so that they were rendered helpless at once. The same power that made him such a formidable foe might be turned to good advantage now that he had no human being to contend with. If he could twist a man's hand so that the bones would crack if he did not yield, why should he not be able to make the stubborn iron of the handcuffs give way?

Thus he argued, and he was determined to make his point if it was possible by any amount of exertion.

He put his two hands close together so that he could clasp his fingers, and then, exerting all his strength he tried to turn the handcuffs one against the other. They were too strong. He thought he felt a slight give in the right handcuff, but before he could follow up the advantage—if he had gained any—he was compelled to cease his efforts for a moment, on account of the intense pain.

"I don't care. I must get them off. Now for another try."

Again he bent all his energies to his seemingly hopeless task, and this time he was sure that he had started something on his right hand, for there was a click that told him he had broken one of the cogs that held the right handcuff in place. At the same time the iron band around his wrist gave way a little, and became a little looser on his wrist than before. Had his wrist not become swollen by the tugging and straining to which he had already subjected it, he might have slipped it off now. As it was, he knew that he must break off at least another cog before he could release himself.

"But you are getting there, all the same, Bob Corden," he whispered, as the perspiration poured down his face from his terrible exertions. "If you can break one, you can break some more, and you will show those rascals up-stairs that they have not called me the Twister for nothing."

He braced himself for a supreme effort, and with an almost herculean effort, he twisted his hands in opposite directions, with the result that there was a more pronounced click than before, and the band on his right wrist became so loose that he knew he had broken at least two more of the teeth of the handcuff, and he shook it off with a cry of triumph that he could not repress.

His right hand was free!

It was comparatively easy for him to get off the other one now, because he could grasp

it with his right hand in such a way as to have an immense leverage, besides having the advantage of his hands being in front instead of behind him.

"So, Mr. Billy the Bowler, here is the first step toward getting out of your clutches. Now, take care you do not get into mine. Cool Bob, the Twister, is a dangerous man to such as you so long as his hands are not fastened!"

He shook his fist at the darkness over his head, just as a rattle told him that something was being done by his enemies.

He had just time to place his hands behind him, so they would appear to be still handcuffed, when a stream of light poured upon him momentarily, as the sliding trap came down with a thud, and flew to its place again.

The light had been apparent for a mere instant, but it was long enough for him to see that some one else had been cast into this awful dungeon, and that that person was Kate Fairleigh.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUNTER AND HUNTED.

WE must go back to the time when Alexander Vantine left the bank, to get a cab, leaving Peter, the watchman, and his son Walter, to wait for his return.

For the first few minutes after the departure of the banker, the watchman had stood looking down at the young man, who had fallen back upon the sofa, in the stupor from which his father had managed to partly arouse him.

"It's a queer proceeding all around," was Peter's savage reflection as he pulled the overcoat of the young man over him a little better, for the morning was chilly, even in the bank, where there were steam-pipes to combat the cold that one must expect in February.

Peter went to the front door and looked out into the dark, quiet streets, and then, shaking his head to express his failure to understand the events of the night, he was just in the act of closing the door when some one hit him in the stomach, and he doubled up like a jack-knife. Then a pair of hands seized him by the collar, and plunged headlong down the iron steps. His head struck the pavement with a crash, and he knew no more.

"So much for him, my tear," exclaimed Morris Cohen, for it was he whose head had come in contact with the watchman's stomach, and it was his hands that had grasped Peter by the collar and pulled him down. "Now for the rest of the job."

He ran into the bank, followed by Guttersnipe, and the two shook Walter Vantine until he opened his eyes and looked vacantly into the face of the Jew.

The young man was still under the influence of the drug, but he recognized Morris Cohen, without realizing where he was, or how unlikely it was that the Jew could be in the bank at that time in the morning for any lawful purpose.

"Come on, my tear. The Serpent's waiting for us. We are going to have lots of fun."

"I don't want any more fun. I am tired," muttered Walter Vantine, closing his eyes, and composing himself for another nap on the sofa. "Tell the Serpent I have gone to bed."

The Jew shook his fist nervously at the young man, and Guttersnipe emitted a chuckle over Morris's discomfiture.

"Hully chee! Ain't this a treat! Morris, I guess you'll have to carry him, if you are going to get him out of this."

"I'll break every bone in your body, you imp, if you don't keep your mouth shut!" hissed the Jew, as he shook Walter again, so violently that he sat up on the sofa and looked full into the face of Cohen.

"Whaat are you bothering me for, Morris? I told you I was tired."

"Vell, do as you like. But you know what the Serpent is if you get him mad vonce. I think you'd better come."

This hint had the desired effect. The young man's addled brain could not comprehend anything clearly, but he knew instinctively that he was in the power of Jim Daly, the Serpent, and he felt that he must not offend him, or the consequences would probably be serious for himself, wherever he might be.

He stood up, mechanically buttoned his overcoat and picked up his hat from the floor where it had fallen, and suffered the Jew to lead him to the door and out into the street, apparently without knowing or caring where he was or where he might be taken.

"Hully chee! He's in a funny state," squeaked Guttersnipe. "I don't believe he knew he was in the bank at all."

"Shut up!" whispered Morris, fiercely, in the boy's ear. "What do you want to talk about the bank for?"

That there was reason for this apprehension on the part of the Jew was proved now, when the young man, stopping on the iron steps, said, with a desperate effort to realize his surroundings:

"What's that about the bank, Morris? When are we going to the bank? I'll have to hurry, or I shall never be there in time in the morning, shall I?"

"Of course you vill, my tear," answered Morris, reassuringly, as he dragged him down the steps, and turned him so that his glance would not fall upon the form of Peter, the watchman, lying insensible at the foot of them. "Ve are just going to see the Serpent, to have a little talk with him, and then you can go home, like a good little boy, don't you see?"

"All right," responded the young man, wearily, as he walked along by the side of the Jew to the nearest station of the Third avenue "L" Road, and plodded up the stairway with the same air of not knowing where he was going that had characterized him since the Serpent had administered the drug to him in the cab.

"Here he is, mother," said Morris, half an hour later, as he entered the back room of the Baxter street store, and, with a dismal attempt at joviality, forced Walter Vantine into an old arm-chair. "He wants to see the Serpent."

"Does he, my tear son? Vell, so he shall, some day. I'm glad you found him. But v'ere's Snipe? He went out with you."

The Jew stared in his mother's face for a moment with a blank expression, and then, with an oath, ran to the door.

"V'at's the matter, my tear son?"

"Matter? Vell, I'll tell you v'at's the matter. I don't trust that young man. I took him with me now because I want him to get mixed up with this business so badly that the police vill surely nab him some time. I don't think he's straight with us. That's v'at the matter, if you want to know it. Now he has gone, and I shouldn't wonder if he has gone to bring the police down on us."

"V'ere are you going?" asked his mother, as Morris, tearing open the door, ran through the store.

"To bring him back—alive or dead!" was the grim reply, as Morris bounced out of the house and closed the front door with a bang.

He looked up and down the street, but not a soul was to be seen. Then he made his way to the Bowery and walked up that thoroughfare, at a swift pace, keeping his eyes open, and looking up the cross streets as he passed them.

"There he is, sure," he exclaimed, breathlessly, as he saw two figures at the corner of a street, one of them being that of a boy whom he recognized at once at that of Guttersnipe. "What's he doing and who's he talking to? This looks like a regular plant, for the kid was behind me when we came down the stairs from the Elevated, and he must have run straight away to this feller as soon as he got down to the street."

He made up his mind that he must see who the boy was talking to, and what he was saying, so, creeping into the shadow of the houses as well as he could, he got near enough to catch a few fragments of the conversation.

"I tell yer I know de mugs as I'm talking about," he heard the boy say. "Dey've got your son, an' dey won't be nothin' left of him if you don't do something, and moughty sudden, too."

"Sh'elp me, if he ain't a-talking to the banker himself. Vell, this is nice," was the Jew's mental observation. "What a young rascal! Oh, the wickedness of this world. And I was trying to bring him up like my own son. Vell, I'll fix him when I do get him home!"

He listened again, and the banker asked where his son was, to which Guttersnipe replied:

"I can tell you where he is, but hully chee, it won't do you no good. See? Dem mugs knows too much for a swell cove like you. But you can get him if you do what I tells yer."

"The police—" began the banker.

"De police," interrupted Guttersnipe, with extreme contempt. "Do you tink dem fellers down in Baxter street wouldn't have everything all cleaned out of the way if de police was to make a raid on 'em? Why, dey's always watching de police, just as much as de police watches dem, and it's nip and tuck between dem all de time. No, you'll have to work dis yer racket yerself if you are going to make it a go, and you hear me crying."

"Can you lead me to the place thrt they have taken my son? If you do, I'll pay you well."

"I don't want no pay. I likes the young feller, see? And I am down on that old sheeny, Morris Cohen. He t'inks he has me dead ter rights. Well, I'll show him an' de oder mugs where he has made a mistake afore he has any more birthdays."

"Do it your own way, only do it," answered the banker, who was rather tired of the volume of slang that issued from the lips of the young man.

"All right. Come with me."

Guttersnipe moved quickly down the Bowery, and Morris Cohen had only just time to slip into the doorway of a store to avoid being seen. The banker hesitated for a moment, and then, without a thought about Barney Doran, followed his youthful guide.

The Jew came out of the doorway and watched them. Then he took a few steps as if he would follow them, but changed his mind and stopped.

"What's the use?" he muttered. "So long as I know he isn't going to the police I don't care. He'll be around to the crib pretty soon, with the old man, too, and I can take care of them when they come. Everything vas all right."

He chuckled in a wheezy way, and was about to retrace his steps toward Baxter street when he observed Barney Doran standing about on the corner, looking for some one, evidently.

The Jew was as sharp as a needle and he comprehended what Barney was after as surely as if Barney himself had given him full information.

"That's that Irish cabman. What is he doing here? He ought to be in bed up in the 'Tenderloin.' He's in with that old man, I'll bet fifty—no, five—dollars."

Morris Cohen was a thrifty gentleman, and he never bet large amounts, even with himself.

He watched Barney moving uneasily about, and had about decided that it did not much matter what Barney did, so long as he could not interfere with the Jew's plans, when he caught sight of another figure that made him start and give vent to a half-stifled oath.

"Vell, if that ain't the vorst I ever saw!"

Morris could hardly believe his eyes, and he rubbed them with his dirty handkerchief most vigorously, in the hope of assisting his vision.

"It's her, sure enough, and she was going to talk to that fellow. Vell, it's time for me to act, or all the fish will be in the fire. Oh, v'at ingratitude!"

He kept well within the shadow of the houses, as the figure, which was that of a woman, passed him swiftly, going toward Barney Doran.

It was Kate Fairleigh!

She had come back to give some information to the banker, possibly a warning, and she was looking straight ahead, without observing the Jew, who came sneaking out of his doorway, so close to her that he could almost have touched her by stretching forth his hand.

"Where did he go, I wonder?" muttered the girl, looking in all directions in the hope of seeing the banker. "That is the worst of men. They never will do as they are told. If he had stayed right here, or gone into the hotel, I could have found him when I wanted him. But now—"

At this instant she caught sight of Barney Doran, staring about him in a mystified manner, and she quickened her steps to catch up to him and ask where the banker was.

But fate was at her elbow in the shape of the Jew, and she never reached Barney. Something flashed past her, and the next moment a handy-billy was swung in the air, and came down on poor Barney's head, knocking him senseless.

Kate turned to run as she saw Morris patting his weapon approvingly, but she reckoned without her host. He had his eye on her, although he appeared to be so careless, and just as she turned to go away he seized her roughly by the arm as he hissed in her ear:

"Not yet, my tear. You have been trying to blow the gaff on the gang, and that settles you. I'm glad I met you now, or there might have been more trouble for all of us."

The girl shook off the Jew's grasp, as she looked him in the face with eyes that were fairly blazing with excitement, and said:

"Keep away from me, Morris Cohen. I am in the open street now, and I'm not afraid of you, nor of Rachel, either. If you put your hand on me again, I'll call for help."

"Vill you?" sneered the Jew. "And what good would that do you? It would put you in the Tombs, wouldn't it? And we would have plenty of good reliable witnesses at the trial to swear that you were mixed up in a lot of rather bad jobs, and they would railroad you to Sing Sing right away. Yes, call for help, my tear!"

Kate recognized the force of the Jew's words, and when he seized her by the arm, and dragged her down the Bowery in the direction of Baxter street, she did not offer any resistance.

CHAPTER IX.

MOTHER RACHEL'S FALSE MOVE.

If Morris Cohen thought Guttersnipe intended to go straight to the Baxter street crib he was very much mistaken. The boy was altogether too sharp for that. He had slipped away from Morris when they descended from the Elevated Road, and he knew perfectly well that when the Jew laid his hands on him it would be a painful moment for the boy.

At the same time the lad knew that the young man, Walter Vantine, was in the Baxter street place, and that if the banker wanted to see his son now, he would have to go there.

"But, you see, cull," he observed, as the two went swiftly down the Bowery, and then turned off so that they could pass down Park Row, toward the Battery, "it wouldn't do you any good to find yer son, if you was caught, too. An' I'm tellin' yer de gang wouldn't care two cents whether you liked it or not if dey once got yer down in dere cellar, where dey has de young feller by dis time."

"What shall we do, then?" asked the banker, impassively, although it would not have been very difficult to detect that he was laboring under terrible excitement under his cool exterior.

"Do as I tells yer," was the sententious response of the boy.

The banker did not answer, but after walking a few steps further he stopped suddenly and looked around.

"What's de matter?" asked Snipe.

"I forgot something."

"What? Yer pocketbook?"

"No. Barney Doran."

"Who's Barney Doran? Yer don't mean de mug what drives de cab at night, do yer?"

"Yes. You know him?"

"Do I know him?" repeated Guttersnipe, with sarcastic emphasis. "Well, I should dance a jig. Why, him and me is almost cousins. I have taught him to play ten-pins. But where is he?"

"I left him at the corner where you met me. He went to the livery-stable to put away his horse and cab, and I was to wait till he came back. But I met you, and forgot all about him."

"I don't t'ink any more of you for dat, I'm tellin' yer. I'd not go back on a pardner that way, you can bet."

The earnestness of the lad made the banker smile, but he did not answer, only

turned and went back over the road they had traveled. It was not necessary to go very far. They had only just reached the Bowery, when they saw Barney hustling toward them at a great rate.

"Dere he is," said the boy, "an' comin' as if he had the whole police force of the precinct at his heels. Hello, Barney!" he cried, at the top of his voice.

Barney came running up, out of breath, and Snipe seized his hand and shook it with a great deal of earnestness.

"Cull, I'm glad ter see yer," he exclaimed, with a heartiness that left no doubt his sincerity.

"I must apologize for not waiting for you, Barney," said the banker, "but I met this young man, who said he could lead me to my miserable boy, and I walked away with him before I thought about your coming back."

"Be the ghost of McCarty's cat!" exclaimed Barney. "It's meself is wishing you had shtopped for a little phwile, 'cause yez moight heve caught the shpalpeen that gave me the tap on the head with his shtick a phwile ago. Sure, me head feels as if it was big enough for two, so it does."

"Who struck yer, Barney?" asked Snipe. "If it was any of de gang, an' I find it out, I'll make them sick, or my name ain't Guttersnipe."

"I'm sorry you were attacked, Barney. They did not rob you, did they?" asked the banker.

"Sorra a bit of it. Nothing was done but a rap on my head with a shtick or a black-jack that seemed to weigh about a ton. I shuppose I ought to feel glad that they did not take all my wealth, but be the same token I only had a few dollars in me pocket, an' they could have had them and welcome, if they had not played the devil's tattoo on me skull."

"Well, so long as you are not seriously hurt, it is not so bad. And when I find my son, I will take care that you are rewarded sufficiently to make up to you for all the pain and annoyance you have had over this business."

"Well, indade, sorr, it 'ud hove ter be a very bad crack on me head that would not be fixed up wid a greenback plaster, as me old father, who was on the police foorce, saving yer honor's presence, used to say, whin they brought him into the police-station on a stretcher, after a shindy wid the 'Dead Rabbit' gang on the Bowery."

While talking the three had been walking swiftly down-town. The dawn was just beginning to break, and the black darkness had given place to a gray atmosphere that was cheerful because it indicated that daylight was not far away, although in itself it was more gloomy than the darkness of the night itself.

Guttersnipe knew his way perfectly, and there was no hesitation in his march toward and down Wall street, which was the way he took his two companions.

"I have brought you de longest way 'round," he explained, "'cause we don't want ter be followed, an' if we had gone straight to de place, dere is no tellin' who might have been after us. I know dem mugs too well ter trust 'em."

At last they reached the foot of Wall street, and saw the East River with its many craft moving mistily about in the early morning and heard the occasional warning bells of ferry-boats and other small vessels, while over all the outlines of the great bridge could be discerned faintly in the semi-darkness.

But Guttersnipe was not troubling himself about these familiar sights and sounds. He was anxious to get to his mysterious destination without being seen by any of his regular companions, and he was very suspicious that they might be somewhere in the vicinity, and be ready to pounce upon him at any moment.

He was satisfied at last that they were not followed, for, taking the banker's hand to guide him, and closely followed by Barney Doran, he suddenly darted through a pair of heavy gates that were partly open, and led the way to the extremity of one of the docks.

"Come on," he said softly, and then disappeared over the edge of the dock, apparently into the water.

"Be the powers he has tumbled into the wather!" exclaimed Barney, in considerable excitement, while the banker stood still, in his usually impassive manner, awaiting further developments.

The two men did not know what to do, because it was too dark to see any object floating in the river unless it happened to be within a few feet of the dock, and they had not seen a sign of Snipe after he had fallen or jumped off the dock. But they were relieved of their anxiety in an unexpected manner.

The flooring of the dock was of old timber, eaten away in many places, and revealing holes large enough for a man's foot to fall through. Up one of these holes was thrust a stick, that gave Barney Doran a rather severe poke.

"Mutherin' Michaelmas! What's that?" A laugh in the tones of Guttersnipe was the response, and then Barney stooped down and called down the hole!

"Is that yerself, Snipe?"

"Yes. Come down."

"Coom down, is it?" An' how am Oi to git down. Sure Oi don't see no space big enough to let a kitten down, let alone a stout, hearty man loike meself, ter say nothin' of Muster Vantoin here."

"Oh, tumble to yourself. Here's a hole big enough to let a regiment of fellers your size come through," replied Snipe, as he poked the stick up in another place, where there was a space in the flooring that bore out his declaration.

In another minute Barney Doran and Alexander Vantine were in a small apartment that, while not luxurious, was at least comfortable. It was made apparently of a number of large packing-cases, hammered together in a rough way by some one with a pretty good idea of carpentering, so that it formed a sort of room about six feet in height, and about ten feet square. A small oil stove was set in the middle of this unique apartment, and there was a box at one end, which when opened by Guttersnipe with a key that he produced from beneath a loose plank attached to the dock, outside the room, revealed a partly-consumed boiled ham, a loaf of bread, three cups, salt, butter and other conveniences of housekeeping. At the further end of the room was a mattress, such as is brought over by emigrants in the steerage of Atlantic steamers, and several gray blankets, that appeared to have come in the same way. A lamp on another box, that was evidently intended to serve as a table, and that Guttersnipe had lighted before inviting his companions down, gave ample illumination to the hiding-place.

"Now, yer see, I jist close this door, and bolt it inside, and no one can come in upon me without knocking or breakin' de door down," observed Snipe, with evident pride in his arrangements. "What do youse fellers think of it? Ain't it out of sight?"

"It certainly is—literally," answered the banker, gravely. "I do not think it would be possible for any one to find this place unless they were guided to it. But now, what is the object in bringing me here?"

"I'll tell yer," answered the boy. "I've took a fancy to your son, 'cause I can see that de gang wants ter git him into trouble, if dey hasn't already, an' I'm going to give away dere tricks sure as I'm here. Now, Kate Fairleigh is a good, square gal. She has been brought inter de gang against her will, and she hasn't never done nothin' dat de police could catch her for."

"Yes, well?" interrupted the banker, rather impatiently.

"Don't be in a hurry, and you'll git dere all de quicker," observed Guttersnipe, with dignity. "I'm tellin' dis story."

Mr. Vantine would like to have given the boy a sharp reply, but he realized that the youngster had the best of the situation, and that nothing could be gained by making him angry, so he waited to let the boy proceed:

"As I was sayin', Kate is a good girl, and a friend of mine. She knows dat I allers try to be square, and dat de gang don't like me on dat account, although I purtend to do whatever dey asks me. But dey is slick, you bet, and dey knows my heart ain't in it."

"Be the bridge of Ballycoran, why don't yez hire a hall?" put in Barney.

"Silence, Irish!" replied the imperturbable Snipe. "I'm doing dis. I'll leave you here,

and I'll git around de Baxter street crib till I meet Kate. Den I'll git her to bring de young mug around here, and you can make what rangements you like ter nab de whole gang, for I s'pose dat is what you mean ter do. It would not do fer me ter try ter get your son up ter your bank or where you lives, or de gang 'u'd be after him so quick dat dere wouldn't be any fun in it."

The banker could not understand exactly why he was brought to this place, or what the boy meant, but he was not the sort of man to ask many questions, so long as he saw that he was on his way to attain his desires. So he took everything just as it came."

"Hark!" whispered the boy, in an agitated whisper, as he turned down the lamp.

There was a light tap upon the door, followed by another.

Guttersnipe was nonplused. Who could this be that had found his way to the secret stronghold of the boy—a stronghold whose existence he had never revealed to another soul, until this morning, when he had brought Alexander Vantine and Barney Doran to it.

The tapping continued at the door, and at last Snipe made up his mind that there was only one thing to be done, which was to open the door, and take his chances on who it might be.

Cautiously he unbolted the door and opened it a little way. But he had no sooner done so, than it was burst open, and in tumbled—Rachel Cohen, the old woman whom Morris Cohen called mother.

"So, there you are, my boy! How glad I vas to see yer. Ve thought you vas lost, and Morris he is almost vild about you. But I thought I would find you. You vas always a favorite of mine."

She stretched out her arms as she spoke, and drew Snipe into her embrace, but with rather more force than he considered necessary.

"Let me go, Mother Cohen," screamed the boy. "I don't like you as much as you do, an' I don't propose to have you slobberin' around me. Git out of here, or I'll t'row yer inter de river."

"Oh, v'at an ungrateful boy!" croaked the hag, as she hugged him tighter, and at the same time gave him a vicious pinch on the cheek that made him howl with pain.

But Barney Doran, who after turning up the lamp, had been watching this performance with a doubtful gaze, as if he did not know just what to make of it, took a hand in now, and clutching the old woman by the shoulder, pulled her away with such force as to swing her around until she fell on the mattress at the other end of the room.

Like a tigress, she sprung to her feet, and this time she had a gleaming knife in her hand.

"Look out, Barney," said the banker, calmly. "She is going to stab you."

"Oh, the old she devil," was Barney's response. "Look at her!"

The old woman threw herself upon him, but he was prepared, and in a moment had wrenched the knife out of her hand, and forced her down upon the mattress again, holding her there.

"Now, you sit still, or I'll throw you in the river," said Barney sternly, and his manner was so impressive that the old woman was convinced he meant what he said.

"Now, here's more of it," remarked the boy. "We'll have to keep her here, or she'll bring de whole gang down on us. She must have followed us to see which way we was going, but I do not think any of de others know where dis crib is."

He opened a small door at the end of the room and revealed a cupboard, in which were fishing-tackle and other rubbish. Several holes were bored in the wooden wall near the top, to let in air, but nothing could be seen through them except the piles that supported the dock, the cupboard being at the end nearest shore, and not facing the river.

The old woman watched him as he opened this door and looked into it, and seemed to divine his purpose, for she made a sudden bolt for the outer door, and but for the promptitude of Barney Doran, who caught her just as she was going through, she would have got out, and that would have been the last of this secret rendezvous, for she would

have the whole gang there within an hour, as Snipe very well knew.

"Phwat a wicked ould woman!" exclaimed Barney, with a grin. "Here, Snipe, where do you want her?"

"Right here!"

"All right. Here she is!"

Before she could make any particular resistance, Mother Rachel was in the little cupboard, with the door shut upon her, and she was as helpless as if she had been walled up in a tomb.

She kicked and yelled with all her powers, but no one took any notice of her, and in another ten minutes there was no one in the room to listen to her noise, except Barney Doran, who threw himself upon the mattress, and dropped into a sleep so sound that it would have taken a dozen Mother Rachels to disturb him.

The banker went straight to the bank, and what Guttersnipe did will be revealed in a future chapter.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SERPENT'S COILS.

It was five o'clock in the evening following the events narrated in the preceding chapters. Alexander Vantine had been at the bank all day, attending to his business in his usual calm, self-possessed way. Peter had come into the bank at nine o'clock, and was about to explain his absence from the bank, but Mr. Vantine had shut him off, and told him that he did not want to hear anything about it. All he wanted was for Peter to go home and go to bed, and be ready for duty the following night. At which Peter had wondered, but had obeyed, unquestioningly, which was what Alexander Vantine required of all his employees.

The officials of the bank had not noticed any undue excitement or disturbance in the manner of their chief, and if they had heard anything about the episodes in the bank the night before, they were too well-trained to say anything about them. Unnecessary discussion of the affairs of the bank were strictly forbidden by Alexander Vantine, and the penalty of an infringement of his rules was discharge, prompt and uncompromising.

Now, at five o'clock in the evening, Alexander Vantine was sitting in his handsome library in his Fifth avenue residence, calmly interrogating his son, Walter Vantine, who was seated opposite to him.

What was said need not be repeated in detail. The sum and substance of Walter Vantine's story was that he had been to the French ball at the Academy of Music the night before, had taken too much wine, and did not remember anything till he found himself in a dirty parlor behind a clothing store in Baxter street, with a man named Morris Cohen, with whom he was slightly acquainted, talking to him about the ball, and asking him whether he had not better go home.

"And then you came home?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what time?"

"It was ten o'clock when I looked at my watch in my own room, before undressing and going to bed."

"Um!"

The banker sat thinking for at least ten minutes before he spoke again, and then it was only to suggest that they go down to dinner.

The father and son sat at dinner in the handsomely-appointed dining-room, with a staid butler waiting upon them, and Walter would have given a good deal to know what was passing in the mind of his father. As well might he have desired to know what Inspector Byrnes was thinking about when he was planning some scheme for circumventing some noted criminal.

A liveried servant entered the room with a card on a salver, taking no notice of the look of indignation cast upon him by the butler, who always resented any sign of interruption of the sacred institution of dinner.

"What is that, Stone?" asked the banker, as he held a glass of claret to the light, and glanced carelessly in the direction of the footman.

"He said as 'ow I was to bring 'is card to you, sir, 'cause he was sure you would see 'im, even if you was at dinner, sir."

The banker looked at the card, and a slight flush overspread his stern countenance.

"Quite right. Bring him here."

The servant bowed, and almost immediately ushered in an elderly man, who might have been the twin brother of the banker, he looked so much like him. The banker signed to the two servants to withdraw, and looked inquiringly at his visitor.

"I see by your card that you are a member of Inspector Byrnes's secret force, Mr.—Mr.—" He looked at the card to read the name, and completed his sentence. "Mr. Harris."

The stranger bowed.

"What have you learned about this affair? Am I right in supposing that there is to be an attempt made upon the bank to-night, and that this notorious bank thief, Jim Daly, or Serpent, is concerned in it?"

"You are not right, Mr. Vantine," answered the stranger, in low, deliberate tones, that caused Walter Vantine to start, involuntarily. "The Serpent is not concerned in the plan to rob the bank—if there is any such plan, which I doubt."

"Who are the people, then? You police always like to be so mysterious when you have any thing in hand."

"If we were not, we should seldom be successful, Mr. Vantine."

There was a touch of quiet rebuke in the tone in which Mr. Harris said this, that would have made any less dignified man than Alexander Vantine feel rather small.

Walter Vantine had not said a word, but he was listening eagerly to the conversation.

"What would you advise me to do then?" asked the banker, after a pause, during which Mr. Harris had fixed his gaze upon the young man's face so earnestly that Walter was obliged to look down at the tablecloth in some confusion.

"Nothing. There is no likelihood of anything being attempted for some weeks, if at all, and I have the men who would undertake the job—if it ever is undertaken—so completely under surveillance, that they cannot stir without my knowing everything they do."

"That is satisfactory so far as it goes. You have dined, Mr. Harris?" asked the banker.

"Not yet, Mr. Vantine."

The banker touched the handbell and ordered a plate for Mr. Harris, who fell to without ceremony and ate with the manner of a man who appreciated a good dinner, and who had breakfasted early enough in the day to make the excellent cuisine of Mr. Vantine particularly enjoyable.

"And now, Mr. Vantine," said Mr. Harris, coolly, as he lighted a cigar, at the conclusion of the dinner, and leaned back in the easy-chair his host had insisted upon his taking, "I should like a little private conversation with your son."

"Certainly, Mr. Harris. I think it would be well. I will go to the library. I have some correspondence to attend to. When you have finished your interview I should like to see you, before you go."

"Very well. Will you tell your servants not to disturb us?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Alexander Vantine, as he left the room.

No sooner had the banker disappeared, than Mr. Harris arose quickly from his chair, in which he had been lolling, the very personification of laziness, and locked the door. Then he went to the two windows, one after the other, and, pulling aside the heavy brocaded curtains, looked out, carefully closing the curtains again.

"I see these windows look down into the back yard, from which it would be easy for any one to climb over the wall into the alley, and thence gain the street," he observed, casually.

"Yes," said Walter.

Mr. Harris was not yet satisfied. He walked all around the room, to see that there was no other means of egress or ingress, or places through which any one outside could spy upon him. He found that there was another door, opposite that by which he had entered, and that it gave upon stairs leading to the kitchen department. It was evidently not often used, for when he turned the key he found the lock was rusty, and having unlocked it and looked out, he locked it again, and was quite satisfied that there would be no interference from that quarter, while the heavy portieres in front of it made it impossible for any one to peep in.

"The folding-doors that communicated with the front room were fastened on the dining-room side, and they, too, were veiled by thick, heavy hangings,

Having completed the survey of the apartment, and satisfied himself that their privacy was complete, Mr. Harris returned to his chair, and taking his cigar from his mouth, removed his iron-gray whiskers, wig and eye-glasses, and revealed the countenance of Jim Daly, *alias* the Serpent.

Walter Vantine did not betray any surprise.

"This is rather a bold thing to do, isn't it?" he asked, quietly.

"Perhaps so. But it suited me to do it," replied the Serpent, taking up his cigar again, and puffing it contentedly. "The old gentleman knows how to choose good cigars. I wonder if he would tell Mr. Harris where they can be procured. I never smoked any like them before that I can remember."

"They are imported specially for him."

"Ah! That's the advantage of being rich. One can eat, drink and smoke whatever he chooses, without caring what it costs."

"Now, Serpent, what do you want?" asked Walter Vantine, suddenly sitting up in his chair and leaning forward. "You did not come here to talk about cigars, I suppose?"

"Not altogether. I have another purpose in view. Did you recognize me through my disguise?"

"Immediately."

"So I thought. But it does not matter, so long as the old gentleman did not suspect that I was any other than Mr. Harris, of the secret police service. He is a smart man, your father, but he is not a match for the Serpent yet. By the way, Walter, I have a check on the Vantine bank—a check supposed to be signed by Alexander Vantine. It is for five hundred dollars."

Walter Vantine turned pale.

"Then it was not a dream?" he moaned.

"Hardly. I have the check, and I am going to present it at the bank to-morrow morning, as soon as the bank opens, unless—"

"What?" interrupted Walter Vantine, eagerly.

The Serpent knocked the ashes from his cigar and inhaled the smoke two or three times with an air of intense enjoyment ere he answered, slowly:

"Unless you and I make different arrangements."

"What do you mean?"

The Serpent looked around the room again and went to the door and listened. Then he came back to his chair and settled himself comfortably, looking at the other with a smile, but without speaking.

"What do you mean, you—you—devil?" demanded Walter, clinching his fist in his agony.

"Just this," answered Jim Daly, with more earnestness than he had shown hitherto. "You know that the gang mean to get into your father's bank. They do not want very much—two or three hundred thousand dollars. But they mean to have that—"

"Scoundrel!" interrupted Walter, half-rising from his chair.

"Sit down, Walter. Don't get excited. You can call for the servants, and have me turned over to the police, or kicked out of the house, after a while, if you think it advisable. But hear what I have to say, first. Your father has never been very kind to you, and you should not care very much about him."

"Stop! I will not listen to any more!" exclaimed Walter.

"Oh, yes, you will! Sit down. I have this check for five hundred dollars, and if you interrupt me again, I will show it to your father before I leave this house, and you know what that will mean for you. You must go with me, and show me the combination of the vault in the Vantine Bank."

"I don't know the combination."

"Don't lie, Walter. It is a bad habit. You do know the combination. I have assured myself on that point already."

"And suppose I do. Do you think I will be a party to a robbery of my own father's bank? The idea is preposterous!"

"Better than going to Sing Sing for forgery."

"I will throw myself on my father's mercy."

"Which will mean the Tombs, a trial, a conviction, and seven years of hard labor. I have that forged check, you know!"

As he uttered this last sentence, in the tone of easy banter that he had used all through the conversation, Walter Vantine could restrain himself no longer. He sprung upon the Serpent, and with his right hand clutching his throat, threw him to the floor and planted his knee in his tormentor's chest.

The attack was so sudden that the Serpent, strong as he was, could not save himself from falling, and when Walter knelt upon his chest he was utterly helpless.

"Now, Jim Daly, I will have that check from you, or I'll choke you to death!" hissed the young man, as he fumbled with his left hand inside the other's coat.

But by this time the Serpent had recovered himself, and with a powerful effort he threw the young man off as if he had been a baby, and stood looking at him contemptuously, straightening his necktie and coat the while.

"Walter, you are a worse fool than I took you for. I have come here for a certain purpose, and that purpose I will carry out. Will you do as I ask you, or not?"

Walter Vantine was thinking, while the Serpent, lighting another cigar, resumed his seat in the easy-chair, and watched him narrowly, a slight smile playing about the corners of his lips, under the dyed mustache. In a few moments Walter brought his fist down heavily on the table, and said:

"I will do it!"

The Serpent grasped his hand.

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Good! Now, sign this paper."

Walter started back. Here was more than he bargained for. He looked hastily over the document that the Serpent had laid upon the table, and saw that it was a confession that he had taken part in the robbery of the Vantine bank, the date being left blank.

"But, if I sign that, I shall be in your power completely."

"Exactly. I must have some security that you will keep your contract."

"And how do I know that you will not present the check for \$500 at the bank, even if I do sign that confession?"

The Serpent took out a pocketbook and produced a check, which he showed Walter in the light of the table lamp, but too far away for the young man to grab at it. Walter saw that it was a check on the Vantine bank, payable to "Cash," and signed by Alexander Vantine.

Without another word he signed the paper, and held it till the Serpent handed him the check. Neither would trust the other, and each held the two papers by either end, and let go of one at the same time. Then Walter had the check and the Serpent the confession.

Walter looked closely at the check, and then held it over the flame of the lamp till it caught fire, allowing it to consume to ashes before he let go, although it singed his finger and thumb in the process.

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and Walter quickly unlocked and opened it, but not before Jim Daly had hastily assumed his gray wig and whiskers. The footman, Stone, was at the door.

"Mr. Vantine's compliments to Mr. Harris, and he would like to see him in the library as soon as convenient."

"I am ready now. Show me the way," said the Serpent, in dignified tones. As he followed the servant from the room, he looked back, and smiled triumphantly at the young man, who had dropped into his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, the picture of dejection.

The door closed, and Walter was buried in a reverie that was as near despair as could be imagined.

How long he would have remained so it is impossible to say, but he was recalled to a sense of his surroundings by a voice he did not recognize, saying:

"Excuse me, but that Serpent is one of the coolest rascals I ever met with."

Walter sprang to his feet, and there he saw, standing in front of the *portieres* that

concealed the door, with the rusty lock, leading to the kitchen, a boyish-looking young fellow, with a ruddy countenance, curly brown hair, and eyes that were as innocent in expression as those of a young girl.

"Who the deuce are you?" demanded Walter, indignantly.

"My name is Robert Corden. I am a detective, and am known in New York as Captain Corden, or, by the crooks, as Cool Bob, the Twister!"

CHAPTER XI.

A DANGEROUS JOURNEY.

WHEN Kate Fairleigh was dropped into the sub-cellar of the Baxter street house, the detective was in a more hopeful frame of mind than he had been before he had managed to rid himself of his handcuffs. As a consequence, he spoke in almost a cheerful tone, when he addressed Kate Fairleigh:

"What have they put you down here for?"

The girl emitted a scream. She had supposed herself alone in this awful place, and when a human voice sounded near her ear it was perhaps not strange that she should be startled. But she was not a nervous girl, compared with other women, and she recovered herself immediately, as she put the very natural question:

"Who are you?"

"Cool Bob."

"The Twister."

"You know me, it seems?"

"By name? Yes. Who does not? That is, among the sort of people I have been forced to associate with nearly all my life."

"Well, Kate Fairleigh, the gang seem to have gone back on you this time, haven't they?"

"Yes, they suspect me of giving their schemes away."

"And are you guilty?"

"I am guilty to this extent, that I will not be a party of their villainy, and they know it."

"And yet you tried to decoy that young man, Walter Vantine, at the French ball, last night?"

"Only to save him. That was the only reason, as I am a living woman!"

There was a momentary pause, and then the voice of the detective came out of the darkness:

"I believe you!"

Corden felt around in the gloom until he touched Kate's hand, which he clasped earnestly.

"I thank you," said the girl, simply, "and if we ever get out of this place, I will prove to you that I am not so bad as you might think from my associates."

"All right. You shall have the chance, I hope. But, in the mean time, how are we to get out of this?"

"There is only one way, and that is by being lifted out through the trap above. I mean, that we cannot escape until those wretches choose to let us out."

"I don't agree with you," said Corden quietly.

"You don't know as much about this place as I do," returned the girl, sadly. "Here we are, in the black darkness, at the bottom of a well, and no outlet at all except the trap that is under the stove of the kitchen over our heads. What hope can we have?"

The detective took from his vest pocket a patent cigar-lighter, in the shape of a fuse that burned with a small but steady flame after he had ignited it by twisting a small silver button. The light showed him the girl standing close to him, looking in wonderment at him.

"Do you see that pipe over there?" he asked, looking cautiously up to the trap over his head, for he could never feel sure that some one might not be looking and listening from the kitchen above.

"Yes."

"Would you go through that pipe if it led to liberty?"

"Liberty?"

"Yes."

The girl hesitated, for she could not understand exactly what the detective meant.

"Look," he went on, as he stepped over to the pipe and showed her a large hole in the pipe through which the water was trickling. "This pipe is eaten so badly by rust

that I have been able to kick a hole in it almost large enough for one to crawl through. I will make it bigger by giving it another kick."

He suited the action to the word, and the result was that a very large piece of the iron was broken off the rust-eaten conduit in addition to that which had already been displaced. At the same instant a slight noise over his head made him turn his light out.

"It is all right," he whispered. "It was only some one moving a chair in the kitchen. But, I am very careful. I would not strike a light before because I am supposed to be handcuffed, and if those fellows were to find out that I have managed to get out of the bracelets, they might fix me in some other way that would not be such an easy thing for me."

"What do you propose?"

For answer, the detective took the girl's hand and led her to the pipe.

"You must not mind getting wet. We shall have to make our way along this water main, in the hope of striking the main pipe. Then, if we can get along that without being drowned, we shall surely find an outlet somewhere."

"I am not afraid of getting wet, and I can swim," answered Kate quietly.

"Good! You are the sort of girl I admire. You have nerve, which is as useful to a woman as a man. Come along. I will go first, and you keep hold of my coat and follow."

It was a perilous and unpleasant trip that the detective had planned, but it was necessary, and he did not hesitate. The water in the big cylinder was high enough to wet both of them thoroughly as they crawled along on their hands and knees, while the atmosphere was not of the kind that is conducive to health.

But the detective did not expect it to be particularly sweet, and he was prepared for some inconvenience in getting out of the clutches of the men who had no doubt made up their minds to kill him, as he felt sure. As for Kate, she had the feeling that it was none of her business. The detective was master of the expedition, and all that remained for her was to obey orders and follow her leader.

For some yards they traveled, in this way, with the dirty water swashing about them and the iron pipe coming in contact with their heads here and there when they incautiously raised themselves. It seemed like a mile to Corden, but it was really only a comparatively short distance, when he suddenly found himself stopped by some iron bars, while a cooler gust of air told him that he had reached one of the huge mains that run under the city in all directions, but eventually empty into one of the rivers.

Corden was pretty well acquainted with the underground geography of New York, and he had calculated to find these gratings here and there. He felt around the grating in the dark, and at last found the bolt that held it in place. To move this back and open the grating was the work of a minute, and then he dropped into a large archway giving his hand to Kate to help her.

"What do you think of this trip?" asked the detective jocularly.

"It's interesting," replied Kate, in the same light vein, "but I hope we shall get out some time."

"I hope so," responded the detective. "Being up to your waist in water is all right at Long Branch, in July, but I do not care for it in a main sewer in New York in February."

Kate was about to answer, and had already given utterance to the words: "I don't think—" when she uttered a most piercing shriek, and began to splash around in the water as if she were demented.

"What's the matter?" cried the detective, in alarm. "What has hurt you?"

But the girl was in too much terror to speak for a moment, and it was only when the detective had taken her hand and given her a gentle shake, that she managed to stammer, while clinging to him with all her strength:

"Rats!"

The detective laughed, as he answered, carelessly: "Oh, is that all? Why, there are hundreds of thousands of rats in these

sewers, and we are likely to meet a few hundreds ourselves before we get out of this. You must not mind them."

The girl shuddered, and it was plain that she was on the verge of fainting. Brave as she was, she had all a woman's horror of rats, and the mere thought of them, in such a place, was almost enough to send her into hysterics.

"It was a great, soft, crawling, twisting thing, and it came right on my shoulder," she said, in a broken whisper. "It put its mouth against my cheek, and I thought I could feel its breath in my mouth. Oh! It was horrible!"

The detective was annoyed. It would never do to let the girl give way like this, when there was such a strong likelihood of their meeting so many more rats in their trip through the sewer. Something must be done to reassure her.

"All you have to do, when a rat comes near you, is to knock it away. You may be sure that the rat is more afraid of you than you of him. There is no danger from them, even in a sewer."

As he spoke, the girl shrieked and clung closer to him.

"Oh! One of them bit me on the arm!" she cried. "It made its teeth almost meet in my flesh!"

This sudden disapproval of what he was saying about the harmlessness of sewer rats annoyed Corden still more, but fortunately the infliction upon the girl of actual pain seemed to have a beneficial effect, for she declared forthwith that she would kill the next rat that touched her, and the tone in which she said it indicated that she was mad, rather than frightened, now.

The detective was a philosopher and a close student of human nature, and he knew it was all right now.

"Once let a woman get real mad," he muttered to himself, "and she will not allow anything to frighten her. I don't think the rats will cause us much trouble now."

And he was right. They resumed their journey, and Kate seemed determined to go through, regardless of rats or anything else that might interfere.

For some time they were not annoyed any more by rats. The arched passageway through which they were passing was wider now, and although the detective could hear an ominous switch now and then that he knew was caused by a rat plunging into the water through which he and his companion were wading, he did not say anything about it, but plodded on with the firm purpose of finding an outlet sooner or later. There were a number of twists and turns, and now the close atmosphere was broken by a rush of cooler air that told him they were getting near the river. He could not tell how far they had walked, but he knew that it was a great distance, considering the sort of place they were going through.

"Where is this to take us out?" asked the girl, at last, as she leaned heavily on the detective's shoulder.

"Not far," he answered, reassuringly. "I can feel the air of the river."

"Because—I—I—am afraid—I—I—cannot go any further."

"What do you mean?" asked the detective quickly, alarmed as much at the way in which the girl spoke, as at the words she used. "You must go further. You cannot stay here. It will mean death. Do you understand?"

But Kate did not answer. He felt her grow heavier on his arm, and he caught her around the waist in time to prevent her falling into the water at her feet.

She has fainted!

"This is a pretty state of things I must say," muttered Corden, who was as nearly nonplused as it was possible for him to be. "What in thunderation am I to do now?"

It was indeed an awkward predicament for the detective. Kate Fairleigh was a good-sized girl, weighing perhaps one hundred and forty pounds, and it was no joke to have her, in an unconscious condition, in a place where it would probably need all the strength and activity of both of them to get them safely out of their dilemma.

He shook the girl violently, in the hope of restoring her to consciousness, and that failing, he tried a remedy that is sometimes used

with athletes when they have fainted from over-exertion. He bit her ear.

The only result of this heroic treatment was to make the girl moan faintly, and then to drop into deep unconsciousness again.

"Well, I don't know! She seems to be completely played out. And yet, I must get her out somehow. I suppose it is a case of carrying her. So here goes!"

Captain Corden, although of rather slight build, possessed the physique of a trained athlete, as we have stated, and it was small exertion for him to raise the young girl to his shoulder, so that she lay across it, with her head resting against his.

Then he bravely struggled on, through the water, determined to save both or neither!

For a few yards he walked on, the load on his shoulder seeming to grow heavier as the minutes passed, and then something made him pause and listen with more intentness than he had betrayed at any other time since entering the sewer.

"It's coming, by George!" he exclaimed.

"Now, we are in for it."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when, with a mighty roar, a great volume of water rushed toward him, and the next instant he and his companion were completely engulfed in a flood that filled the archway to the very top!

CHAPTER XII.

AN AWKWARD MEETING AVOIDED.

BARNEY DORAN was very tired, and when he dropped to sleep in the crib belonging to Guttersnipe it was with the determination of making his nap long enough to recruit his exhausted energies and make him ready for anything that might fall in his way when he awoke. He felt now that he was a full-fledged detective and he enjoyed the experience, in spite of the fact that it had been rather rough, and without any particular reward in view in the way of money.

But he was not to enjoy a long sleep. Mother Rachel had no idea of remaining shut up in this little cupboard until some one chose to release her, and she applied all her energies to getting out.

The door was strong, and kick as she might at it, she could not make any more impression on it than to cause it to shake violently, with a noise that would have awakened Barney if he had not been so completely worn out.

She bit her lip in rage as she found herself powerless to move the door, and if any one could have seen her face they would have seen that it expressed a ferocity that is not pleasant on any face, and least of all on that of an elderly woman.

"The young imp of Satan! When I do get out of this, I'm thinking it won't be long before he is in the hands of the police, and then he won't get out again in a hurry. Morris has enough against all of them to hang the whole gang. And even if he hadn't, he could soon find evidence enough. Swearing in a court is an easy thing if you are not very particular."

She uttered a hard, dry laugh, that boded no good to her enemies, and then she searched among her clothes for something that she could use in her present predicament. She soon found it, and then she laughed again, in the same heartless tone.

The something she had been looking for was a long, keen knife, of the jack-knife pattern, but sharpened to a point, and supplied with a spring, so that when it was open it would not close again accidentally.

It was a formidable weapon in the hand of an unscrupulous or desperate person, and that was the character of Mother Rachel.

She did not waste any time, but set to work at the door with the knife, cutting a hole through the wood near the place where she had noticed the bolt at the moment she was being thrust into the closet.

The sharp blade went through the wood, and the old woman cut away at it till there was very soon a pile of chips on both sides of the door, and a hole large enough for her to thrust her hand through.

Again she laughed as she shot back the bolt and stepped into the outer room.

"They can't keep Mother Rachel in when she wants to get out," she muttered. "Now, Mr. Snipe, I'm thinking you will wish you

had never tried to play your tricks on Mother Rachel."

She glanced at Barney Doran contemptuously, as she made her way to the hole by which she would gain the wharf above her, and then, moved by a spirit of vengeance that she could not restrain, she came back to him and poised the knife over the sleeping man.

She was aiming straight at his heart!

The look of ferocity in the face of the old Fury seemed to make it impossible that the unconscious man could escape the fatal blow that was about to descend, and it seemed as if his life was worth not a minute's purchase.

"You meddling jackanapes!" she hissed, as she clutched the dagger and would have buried it in his body, but, controlled by one of those mysterious influences that sometimes interfere for the preservation or ruin of human beings, Barney Doran rolled at that moment completely over in his sleep, and the knife was buried in the mattress, the force of the blow actually causing the old woman to fall forward and tumble heavily upon Barney, her sharp, skinny elbow digging into his face.

"Phwat's that!" he yelled, as he struggled to a sitting posture, about half awake, and rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand.

The old woman was so completely non-plused by the escape of the victim and her own ignominious tumble, that she could not answer. She lay on the mattress, sprawling about like a very ugly old spider that had somehow partly assumed the shape of a woman, with her knife digging into the straw stuffing of the bed in impotent rage.

"Well, be the corpse of Dinny Rattigan's pig, if you ain't a soight, Oi niver saw the back of my own hand!" he muttered, looking at the old woman, with edifying disgust. "Git up out of thot, yez ould shpalpeen, or it's meself will be breaking ivery bone in yer ould carcass, so Oi will."

The old woman struggled upon her knees, and glared at him with her green eyes with an expression of such devilish ferocity that Barney involuntarily stepped back.

"You cur!" she hissed.

Barney did not like to be addressed in that disrespectful manner, and he realized, moreover, that the old woman should be in the cupboard, where she had been placed for safety by Guttersnipe. So he caught her by her two arms, all squirming as she was, and, as she did not receive this treatment very kindly, but tried in vain to strike him with her knife, he banged her down on the mattress with such force that the knife flew out of her hand.

She tried to release herself, so as to reach her knife, but Barney was too quick for her.

"Indade, thin, ye don't have that bit of a knife if Oi kin help it, ond Oi think Oi kin," observed Barney, with a smile.

He threw the old woman into a corner, and picked up the knife before she could recover herself. Then he approached her, with the knife in his hand, ready for business, for he felt that she was not to be trusted, even if she was only an old woman.

"You'd cut me, would you?" she croaked.

"Not on any account, madame. Oi wuz always perloite ter the ladies, do ye moind? Wull yez be pl'azed to go inter yer boodoor, whoile Oi holds open the dure fer yez?"

He spoke in a tone of mocking politeness that was maddening to Mother Rachel, and it is certain that if she could have got possession of the knife for a moment, she would have made it very lively for the bantering Irishman. But he had the best of the situation, and he knew it. So he only laughed at her, as he pointed to the cupboard.

She stood her ground resolutely, and Barney saw that if he was to get her into the cupboard, he must carry her there. Since he had been left in charge of her, he made up his mind that he would carry her, if necessary, and he approached her with an expression on his face that was different from that it had worn a moment before, when he was making fun of her.

"Git in there," he said, sternly.

"I won't!"

"Oi think ye wull."

"Put me in, then."

"I wull."

Barney advanced upon the old woman, but she was much more active than might have been supposed from her appearance, and she jumped aside and dealt Barney a blow in the eye with her scrawny fist that made him see stars.

"Ow, ye ould skithereen!" he exclaimed, as he caught her around the waist and threw her, all in a heap, into the cupboard. "Shtay there, wid yerself, wull yez, until Oi take yez out again."

He closed the door with a bang and bolted it with one hand, while he wiped his injured eye with the other.

The old woman was ominously quiet. Barney expected to see her hand come through the hole to reach the bolt but it did not come, and after a few moments he cautiously opened the door and peered in. As he might have expected, Rachel was waiting for him, and no sooner was the door opened wide enough than her hand shot out, and dealt him another thump—this time in his mouth.

"Bedad! Ye'll shtay there now, an' Oi'll not be disturbin' yez, so Oi won't Oi t'ought Oi'd shtay here an' hove a bit of a shlap befoor goin' up-town, but begorra, Oi think Oi'll go to me boordin'-house and lie down till the afternoon. Thin Oi'll go to the bank, an' see whether Mr. Vantine wants me, or whether he has foired me out of his service. Ye can't trust any one these days, so ye can't."

Indeed, there seemed to be considerable reason in Barney's complaint, for he had been dropped rather unceremoniously in this secret crib, and he did not know where Snipe and the banker had gone, except from the hint the boy had let drop, to the effect that he was going to bring Walter Vantine here.

Barney had a sort of presentiment that there was trouble at the Baxter street dive, where Snipe was supposed to have gone, and, putting this and that together, he could not see that it would be profitable for him to remain where he was, now that he saw sleep was out of the question.

"Oi'll just shlip out of this place, and let the ould woman have it all to herself, so Oi wull," he muttered.

But he could not resist the temptation to make it a little more pleasant for her before he went, just to get even with her for the attempt upon his life and for the two vicious punches she had given him. There were plenty of nails around the interior of the cabin, used apparently for hanging clothing, hats and various articles of culinary use, upon. Taking the jack-knife belonging to Mother Rachel, from his pocket, he knocked out one of the nails with the handle and then fastened the nail in against the bolt in the door of the cupboard, with the same implement.

"There, me lovely shwateheart. If you shpring that bolt now from the inside, faith, ye're welcome to git out, so yez are," he observed, with a smile, as he opened the door of the hut, after blowing out the light in the lamp, and crawled to the dock above. It was broad daylight now, and he had no difficulty in finding his way to the upper world.

"Be me sowl, the air tastes good," was his first remark as he took a long inspiration of the cool river breeze.

The dock was quiet enough at that early hour, and he walked to yard the gate without meeting a soul till he got just outside, where he ran plump into the arms of Morris Cohen.

"Good-morning, my tear! Where vas you going, this morning?" asked the Jew, with a smile that he meant to be propitiatory.

Barney's answer was to take the Jew by the shoulder, and swing him violently aside, so that he banged up against the gatepost with a force that took all the breath out of his body for the instant. When he recovered himself Barney was gone!

The Jew looked in the direction in which Barney had disappeared and shook his fist.

"It vas all right, my tear! But I know you now, and I vas going to attend to your case before long. I can wait a little vile! I can wait! Now, I must find the old woman. She vas my mother, and I can't let any one hurt her, even if she vas an old fool. Snipe has been vatched coming to this yard, and I thought the old woman would haf brought

him back. But, instead of that, she vas lost, as vell as the boy! Ah, vhat a vicked world it vas!"

Thus moralizing, Morris went inside and walked out on the dock, looking all about him to try and discover whether there was any hiding-place in the neighborhood.

"Ah! Vhat vas that? I thought I heard some one call! I did! Yes, I did hear some one!"

A cry, in a woman's voice, could be faintly distinguished immediately beneath his feet, and he was down on his knees, looking through the cracks in the flooring. He was used to queer discoveries, and moreover he was sure that Snipe had some secret retreat in the neighborhood. So it did not surprise him when he saw the carefully built cabin with which the reader has already become acquainted.

Although a casual observer might not have noticed that the crib was anything more than an accidental boarding up of a part of the space between the piles descending into the muddy water, Morris knew at once that he had found the place of which he was in search, and he sought the means of reaching it. He soon found it, and in less than two minutes he was knocking out the nail that held the bolt of the cupboard in which his mother was confined, and soon Mother Rachel, considerably ruffled, and as mad as a hornet, stalked out and looked at him reproachfully.

"Mother!"

"Yes, and when you vant a yone to look for that boy again, send one of your men."

"Are you hurt, mother?"

"No, I vas not much hurt, but that Irishman vill be when I get my hands on him again," was the sulky answer.

In a few words, Mother Rachel told of her adventures, punctuating her recital with threats against Barney, Guttersnipe, and every one except her son of whom she seemed to stand in considerable awe. Particularly did she inveigh against Kate Fairleigh, and it is safe to assume that if the girl had been within reach of the hag's ten fingers at that moment, the claws on those fingers would have sought poor Kate's face.

"Let's get out of this place, mother. Ve know where it vas, now, and it may be useful some time. But where vas Snipe?"

"I haven't seen him."

"Never mind. He vill be back here some time. Then ve catch him. Come. Let us go."

The old woman had come down by another way than over the edge of the dock, and she showed her son where it was. She climbed up with considerably agility, declining the proffered assistance of her son, and the two precious beauties made their way with all haste to Baxter street.

They had hardly disappeared from the crib, before a man, soaked with water, with a woman's form held tightly over his shoulder, crawled up from the river and dropped exhausted on the little platform just outside the crib under the dock. Had he been a minute sooner he would have encountered the Jew and his mother, and this narrative might have taken an altogether different turn.

"Phew!" said the man, as he carefully laid his companion on the little ledge and tried to wipe some of the water out of his eyes, "this is as tough a job as I have ever had in my life!"

Is it necessary to say that the half-drowned man and woman were Cool Bob, the detective, and Kate Fairleigh?

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE WATER DEMON'S CLUTCH.

THE reader will be curious to know how the detective and his companion managed to reach the comparative safety of Guttersnipe's secret retreat under the dock.

When the great rush of water in the main sewer almost took all the breath out of the detective he was for a moment in such a dazed state that he could not do anything.

He clung tightly to Kate, however, perhaps more through instinct than anything else, and was thrown about by the rushing water, without making any attempt to get out. True, there was nothing he could have done, for the water actually filled up the

whole space, and although he floated to the top, his head touched the bricks in the roof of the arch, and he was thus kept under the flood in spite of himself.

Fortunately, the rush of water was a mere sudden "flush," for it subsided almost, although not quite, as quickly as it had arisen, and as the detective got his mouth and nostrils above the flood, his ideas returned, and he was able to account for the catastrophe.

"One of those confounded steamers, or a ferry-boat, must have got near the mouth of the sewer. That is what it was, no doubt. Deuced unpleasant, but this whole thing is unpleasant for that matter," was his philosophic comment.

There was some satisfaction in the matter, for it proved to the detective that they were not very far from the mouth of the sewer, and that they would soon know their fate. Either they were to get out all right, or to be drowned like kittens in a bag.

One thing took place now that gave the detective encouragement. Kate was regaining consciousness. He felt her move on his shoulder, and as he gently dropped her to her feet in the water she took her arms from his neck, and stood alone, with her hand resting lightly on his shoulder.

"That's a relief. How do you feel now, Kate?" he asked.

"I—I—have been dreaming," she said, feebly. "Oh, yes I remember all, now."

"Do you? Then, you must remember that we have been having a rather rough time, and a damp time at that," responded the detective. "Can you walk a little, now?"

"Yes, I am all right."

"I don't think you are," was the detective's unspoken comment. "But if you can walk for a while it will give me a chance to get up my strength for another spell of carrying you."

He gave her his arm, and they plodded on for a few yards further when another rush of water took them off their feet, and sent them floating about helplessly until the wave subsided.

As soon as the water had gone down enough for them to touch the bottom again Corden took the girl by the arm and dragged her forward as fast as they could go. His object was to make as much headway as possible before they were again taken off their feet, for he felt sure that they had not experienced the last of the waves. He realized that the nearer they approached to the mouth of the sewer, the more likelihood there was of their meeting these resistless masses of water, because any craft passing near the mouth would wash up some water, that would go a little way into the sewer, although not so far as the waves from a ferry-boat or other steam-using vessel.

They must expect to be washed off their feet each time, and the only chance for them was to get so far ahead that they would make progress in spite of these setbacks.

The detective felt sure that, if it were not for these waves, he would have been out of the sewer before this.

Kate was now very weak, and whenever one of these waves broke into the vaulted space through which she and her companion were laboriously making their way, she seemed to lose some of the power she had had, and it took the detective several minutes to get her into condition to go on fast, which left a short space of time between the waves for them to proceed on their journey.

But he bravely stuck to his task, and as he had the assurance of Kate herself that she was improving all the time, it was reasonable enough for him to believe that it would not be long before the crucial moment would arrive, when they would either be saved or irrevocably be lost.

They had just emerged from a particularly large and powerful wave, when the detective uttered a cry of joy. *He could see daylight!*

"See, Kate. There is a shaft of light just around that bend. It means that we are near the East River, and that we shall soon have a chance to fight for our lives in the open, even if we are to be beaten at last.

"We shall not be beaten at last," responded the girl, faintly, but confidently.

"That's the kind of talk," said the detective, admiringly. "It is what I like to hear, either from a man or woman."

They moved forward at a quicker pace now, the prospect of soon being out of this dark, awful place having a wonderful effect upon the girl, so that even when a big rat jumped on her shoulder and off again just as they reached the bend in the sewer she did not even shudder.

The lapping of the river outside the entrance to the sewer could be plainly distinguished, and the cool air blew in with considerable force, as was natural, there being a strong draught through the archway, which was no doubt to be thanked for the two refugees not having been stifled by the smell of the sewage.

"Now, Kate, you told me you could swim."

"So I can."

"Well, prepare to swim."

"Very well."

A few more steps, and they were at the very edge of the arched main, with the East River before them, shining in the early morning sun, so that it looked like a sea of blood.

"Pretty, but cold," observed the detective, sententiously. "But we are used to the cold by this time. Now, Kate, come!"

As he spoke he threw himself forward into the river just as a rolling wave from a passing ferry-boat dashed against him. When he recovered himself, he found that he was some distance back in the sewer, and that his companion had disappeared.

"Kate," he cried, as he rushed forward, and plunged into the river with a strong stroke.

He heard a faint cry somewhere to his right, and he turned in that direction, swimming with all the power he could summon, for the cry was in the voice of Kate Fairleigh, and it told that she was in distress.

He raised himself in the water, but could not see anything of the girl, but another cry guided him toward a cluster of piles that upheld a dock, and that arose from the water in the midst of a lot of sawdust, splinters of wood and other rubbish such as is always attracted to the shore of a strong tidal river.

"Kate!"

"Here I am! Hurry! For pity's sake, hurry!"

There could be no mistake that the girl was in sore straits, and Corden shot forward in the water with a speed that was wonderful, considering that he was fully dressed, and that his clothes were dragging him down.

Half a dozen swift strokes brought him within view of the girl, who was holding to one of the slippery piles with all her strength—a strength that was fast giving out.

"Hold on, just a minute, and I'll be with you," shouted the detective, encouragingly, as he noted how weak the girl was.

He redoubled his efforts, and was within a yard of her, when, suddenly, a tug-boat went puffing by, and a series of waves came upon him, and in spite of all his efforts, sent him back, and dashed him violently against one of the piles, some distance from the girl. His head struck the head of a large spike and stunned him for the moment. He ceased swimming and sunk like a stone.

The wave caught Kate, too, and her grasp slipped from the slimy wood, allowing her to drop back in the water. She did not sink, however. She was an expert swimmer, and realizing intuitively that she was too weak to swim, she threw herself on her back, and allowed herself to float idly at the pleasure of the surf.

The detective did not remain below the surface long. Although the blow upon his head caused him exquisite pain, he was not knocked senseless for more than a moment, and he had hardly begun to go down before he struck out and rose to the top again.

His first thought was of the girl. He saw that he had been washed away from the pile to which she had been clinging, and he looked around in the hope of seeing her somewhere in the vicinity.

"There she is," he cried, involuntarily,

"and she is a brave one, too. They can't kill a girl like that!"

He swam toward where Kate was floating on her back, and this time he managed to get hold of her. She turned her face toward him, and, feeling that she was safe, swooned again.

"Never mind. She will be all the easier to handle like that," thought the detective, as he seized her by the top of her dress behind, so that she could rest her head upon his arm, and he swam toward the piles, and clasp one of them, managed to get his foot on a big spike that he felt with his foot under the water.

It was a difficult task to raise himself and his burden out of the water, but the detective was a wiry fellow, with marvelous power in his hand, and when he saw another great spike sticking out of the wood a foot over his head, he made up his mind that he could crawl out without so very much trouble if he could once reach that spike.

It required several efforts, but he was successful at last, and he was gradually going up the pile, with Kate in his arms, when he heard voices over his head that he recognized, and that made him cease his exertions.

The voices were those of Morris Cohen and his mother, and although Bob did not understand how the Jew and Mother Rachel had come to this spot, he knew he had not made any mistake as to the fact, and that it would not be wise for him to show himself to them at this moment, in his exhausted state, and with Kate Fairleigh actually unconscious.

"What in thunderation are they doing here?" he muttered. "I wish they would get out."

Perhaps he might have been obliged to show himself, for he could not have remained in his present position very long, but fortunately, they did not keep him more than a few moments. They were just about to go away, as related in the last chapter, and by the time the detective had made up his mind that he must meet them at any risk, because he could not hold on any longer, they had crawled to the dock above them and the coast was clear.

To reach the ledge in front of the crib was the work of a moment now, and the detective was bestowing some hearty kicks upon the door of Guttersnipe's retreat that soon forced it open.

He carried the girl inside, lighted the lamp, and then closed the door. He made free with everything in the place, and hunted around for something to revive the girl. He found coffee, bread and butter, ham and other comestibles, and noticed that there was an oil-stove. He lighted the stove and put some coffee on to boil, there being a pail of pretty clean water in one corner that he presumed was intended for drinking purposes, and that he concluded would be good enough if it were boiled with coffee.

"Ah! This is cool. We ought to get some dry clothing, but it is not likely that there is anything of that kind here. And yet, I don't know. What's this?"

On the mattress already referred to there were some quilts and blankets that looked as if they might have been stolen from a dry-goods house, as they were new and clean. He turned them over and then he caught sight of something sticking out from beneath the mattress that made him utter a cry of satisfaction.

It was a woman's dress of dark brown cloth, and searching a little further, he found skirts and other articles of women's attire, including several pairs of slippers.

"I don't suppose these things were acquired honestly, but they are very handy at this time."

He looked at Kate, who was sitting back in a chair in a corner, watching him considerably interested, as she gradually came back to herself, for she had come out of her swoon as soon as the detective had taken her from the water, and, with the strong constitution she possessed, was not so very much the worse for her terrible experience of the night.

"Kate, you will have to rig yourself out in these things, and then we will see what is next to be done."

"Very well, Bob," answered the girl,

composedly, for she had perfect confidence in the detective, and would have done anything he suggested as the best under the circumstances.

"I will go around to a saloon I know of in the neighborhood, and where they know me, and get my things dried, while you are changing your things, and will be back in half an hour. Look after that coffee, and keep the door locked while I am gone. I won't be more than half an hour, and when I come back we will have a little breakfast, and see what is next to be done."

"I think some sleep would be a good thing for both of us," suggested Kate, with a smile.

"You are right, but you can't sleep in Mother Rachel's house, and I must find some other place for you. Now, hurry and get into those dry clothes, and drink a cup of hot coffee as soon as it is ready."

No sooner had the detective gone than Kate did as he had told her, with the result that she felt strong enough for anything. The dress and other things fitted her as well as if they had had been made for her, and the cup of hot coffee that she took put new life in her.

She was smiling at herself in a broken piece of mirror nailed up against the side of the shanty, as she arranged the long, dark tresses of her hair, when she started, with a half-suppressed shriek, as she saw another face looking at her over her shoulder in the mirror.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLEARING THE DECKS FOR ACTION.

For a moment Kate felt a return of her faintness. Then she saw whose face it was, and she felt that it was not to be feared, especially when a well-known voice cried, cheerfully:

"Hully chee! If this ain't one of dem funny t'ings w'ot only happen once in a while, may I be 'lectrocuted!"

"Snipe!" cried the girl, as she turned around.

"Snipe it is," and to show that he was glad to see her, the lad caught Kate's hand in his own not over-clean paw, and gave it a squeeze that bespoke the heartiness of his welcome.

"What brought you here?" asked Kate, as she tried not to show that the boy had hurt her fingers. "What place is this?"

"Oh, Kate, how ignorant some people is, and free schools all over de country! Why, dis is my crib, where I has my friends come to see me when I don't want de oder mugs to know where I is. Dis is Snipe's Castle, an' I has a water entrance, and a land front, don't yer see? I might ask w'ot brought you here, if I wasn't too perlite ter ask imperdent questions of a girl."

"I'll tell you how it was, Snipe," answered the girl, with a smile. "Morris and the gang dropped me down the trap under the kitchen, and I have managed to get out of it, by way of the river, and here I am."

"W'ot yer givin' us? Do yer think I'm a gilly? Tell me yer got out of dat lower cellar and out ter der river! Go an' tell dat ter some of der baby mugs, but don't try ter give it ter me. It won't work."

"But I did, I tell you, Snipe. Before they had put me down there, they had dropped the detective—"

"The Twister Detective?" interrupted the boy, excitedly. "W'ot, do yer mean ter say they had him down der hole?"

"Yes."

"Den yer needn't say no more. If he wos down dere wid yer, of course yer got out. I tell yer dat feller's a bird. See? Dey could not keep him in any hole, if dey was ter put a hundred tons of gun-metal over der door. No, he can't be held down by none of dem Baxter street mugs, an' don't yer forgit it. See?"

The boy shook his head in a manner that meant he would like to see any one disprove the position he was taking on the detective's prowess, and when Kate told him in detail how she and Corden had made their way through the rusty iron pipe, and then by way of the arched main sewer to the East River, he only nodded his head from time to time, and accepted the whole story as the most natural thing in the world, and just

what he would have expected of a man as smart and brave as Cool Bob Corden.

"But if Cool Bob brought yer here, where is he?" asked Snipe.

"He will be here directly," answered the girl. "He has gone to change his clothes. We were both soaked with water. So he went to a place he knows in the neighborhood, and I stayed here and—"

"Put on dem togs w'ot I swiped from Mother Rachel," interrupted the boy, with a broad grin. "I'm going ter give dem things back ter der people w'ot dey wos took from—dat is, when you get t'rough wid dem. Dey was stole from a boardin'-house on Fourteenth street by Ikey Bill, an' Mother Rachel gave him five dollars for der lot, trunk an' all. I know de gal w'ot dey belongs ter, an' I don't propose to let de gang rob her if I knows myself. So as soon as der old woman got der trunk stowed away in der back of der store, I sneaked up dere and took der t'ings away, bit by bit, waitin' fer a chance ter return 'em widout gettin' myself into no trouble. I couldn't take der trunk, too, but if der gal gets back her clothes, I guess she will let der trunk go."

Guttersnipe was obliged to pause for breath after delivering himself of this long speech, during which he looked admiringly at Kate, who was busying herself preparing some coffee and other materials for breakfast.

"Don't you want some breakfast, Snipe?"

"Well, I should say so. I've been up all night, and I'm hungry and thirsty and tired. When I've had somet'ing to eat an' drink, I'll just lie down here an' take a snooze."

"I wouldn't if I were you," put in another voice, quietly, and Snipe, turning quickly, saw Cool Bob, the Twister, standing behind him, smiling.

"Hallo, Bob," cried the boy. "Ain't seen you fer a long time. Where ha' you been keepin' yerself?"

The boy's manner was familiar, and he did not seem the least bit in awe of the detective whose name was a terror to so many of the crooked fraternity of New York. But evidently the two understood each other.

"This is your crib, eh, Snipe?" asked the detective, still smiling. "I didn't know you were so well fixed."

"Well, I had to get a place of my own, you know, Bob. Since the time you took me in for stealing a pocketbook, I've been trying to keep straight. Although it is pretty hard to do it when a feller has to stay wid dat gang down on Baxter street."

"Never mind, Snipe, you are through with them now."

"Yes, I know dat. I wouldn't go in dere again for a fortune. Dey would never let me out alive."

"I know that, too, Snipe."

"Seems to me you know everyt'ing, Bob," returned the boy, admiringly. "But I tell you it is gettin' pretty hot down in der dive."

"Yes, and it is likely to get pretty hot down here, too. Mother Rachel and Morris were here just now."

"Morris?"

"Yes."

Snipe whistled.

"I knew de old woman was down here, because I fastened her in der cupboard over dere. An' just now I saw der two of dem walkin' long der streets, an' I t'ought p'raps he had found her. But I kept out of dere sight. I didn't want ter have no guff wid dem people."

"They will be back before long, you may be sure," observed Kate.

"You are right," agreed the detective. "It will therefore be a wise thing for us to leave as soon as possible."

"You ain't afraid of dem, are you, Bob?" asked Snipe, somewhat surprised.

"No, but I do think it would be wise for them to find out I am here. I don't know whether they even know that Kate and I have escaped from the cellar yet. Let us have breakfast, and then we will leave."

"All right, Bob. I'm wid yer."

The three gathered around the table, and Kate, who had been busy over the oil-stove, gave them hot coffee, ham, bread and butter, and what other provisions she could find, and they all enjoyed a hearty meal, Bob looking around him now and then in the

pride of proprietorship, and feeling that he was indeed a host.

"Now, the next thing is for us to get a few hours' sleep," said the detective, as they concluded their breakfast, and he noticed that the girl was hardly able to keep her eyes open. "Where can we send Kate, I wonder? I do not think it would be wise for her to go to a hotel, because it would excite remark. I suppose I had better take her to my sister's in Harlem."

"I've got a better scheme dan dat," put in Snipe. "Dere is a boarding-house on Fourteenth street, near Third avenue, where dat girl lives w'ot owns dem clothes. She is a dressmaker, an' a mighty good girl, too. She has given me a meal many a time when I've been hungry, so she has, an' dat's one reason why I wouldn't allow dem Baxter street mugs to get away wid her togs. I'll take Kate up dere an' I know she can stay as long as she wants."

"Very well. Take her there, and then I want you to come with me," said Bob. "We will go on a Broadway car, all together."

This arrangement suited all, and in less than ten minutes the three were riding up Broadway, in the happy consciousness that no one would suppose from their appearance that they had passed through a night which was anything but peaceful.

Guttersnipe was as good as his word in bestowing Kate Fairleigh comfortably with the dressmaker at the Fourteenth street boarding-house, and when he rejoined the detective at the corner of Third avenue, after introducing Kate to the dressmaker, he said that the two girls had taken to each other from the first, and he thought he had made a very good arrangement.

"Now, let us go and get some sleep ourselves, Snipe," said the detective. "You will have to come to my room, on West Thirty-seventh street."

A very comfortable suite of rooms was the home of the detective, and it was not more than ten minutes after he and Snipe had entered the apartments when they were both sound asleep in adjoining rooms, recruiting their strength for whatever might come in their way when they awoke.

It was late in the afternoon when the Twister Detective opened his eyes, and stretched himself with a feeling of comfort, for he possessed a vigorous constitution, and a few hours of sleep were always enough to recuperate him after any exertions, even when they were so severe as those of the preceding night. He went to the bedroom adjoining, and was soon in the delights of a plunge, in cold water, followed by a brisk rubbing that made him feel like a new man.

As he emerged from the bathroom he saw Snipe sitting up in bed in a bewildered condition.

"Hully chee! This is der swellest place I ever slept in," said the young man, grinning at the detective. "I believe I'll stay an' board wid you always, Bob."

"All right, Snipe. Are you going to take a bath?"

The boy shook his head.

"Not to-day, Captain Robert. I took one last month, an' I don't want ter put on too many airs all ter once."

"I think you had better," suggested the detective. "It will make you feel better."

"Is the water warm?"

"Yes. You can use all the hot water you want. But I used cold, and I feel like a two-year-old," answered Corden.

"Well, I'll try it hot. I don't want ter try no tricks wid my constitootion," answered the boy, with a grin, as he sprung out of bed, and going to the bathroom, began to splash around like a young porpoise, while the detective completed his own toilet.

"Now, Snipe," said the Twister Detective, "I want you to go down to Baxter street, to try to find out when they are going to carry out this job at the bank. I know they are going to do it pretty soon, but I want to know exactly when. They are trying to give the impression that they have dropped it altogether, but I know better. Do you think you can find any of the crowd down there who will let you know something about it, without getting yourself into their clutches?"

"Yes," answered the boy, confidently. "If I meet Billy the Bowler, I'll be all right. He won't know anything about my

putting Mother Rachel in dat cupboard in my crib, because de old woman and Morris will both be afraid to let any one know dat dey were down dere. Dey never tell de rest of de gang anything dat dey do. Dey's awful suspicious mugs, dey is."

"Very well. Then you get down there, and be back here by nine o'clock. Here's an extra key to the room, and you can ring the bell at the front door. I'll tell the people down-stairs that they are to let you in when you come."

"All right. Dat all?"

"That's all."

"Good-by, den, till nine o'clock."

As the boy spoke he slipped out of the room, and a moment later the detective heard the front door bang.

"He's a lively boy, that, and now I've got him away from those rascals on Baxter street, I believe I shall be able to make a man of him," soliloquized the captain, as he walked leisurely toward the banker's house, on Fifth avenue, and where, as we know, he appeared very unexpectedly to Walter Vantine in the back parlor, after the young man's interview with the Serpent.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RATS AND THE FOX.

WHEN Morris Cohen and Rachel returned to the Baxter street store they were in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. They both feared that the boy, Guttersnipe, would get into mischief, and that the result might be a thorough overhauling of their place, with the revelation of secrets that would not be for their benefit. Shrewd as Morris was, he did not think it possible that the police knew anything about the underground kitchen, and still less about the sub-cellar, into which he had sent the detective and Kate, and that he determined should be the grave of the man, if not of the woman.

"Vell, my tear son, ve are in a bad fix, eh?" observed the hag, when she and her son had reached the parlor behind the store, after carefully securing the front door.

"Shut up!" was Morris's undutiful response. "Let me think!"

"You should have thought before, my tear. Now is the time to act, not to think. That boy has got away, and he vill bring all the police about our ears before ve can get things ready to make a good showing. You mark my vords."

"I'll mark your face with my fist, if you don't stop your croaking," howled Morris, savagely. "Where's the gang?"

"Down-stairs, my tear, fast asleep."

"Well, get out of the way!"

He pushed aside the table and opened the trap in the way already described, and let himself down to the lower apartment. He went through the usual form before Ikey Bill opened the door and let him into the kitchen.

Billy the Bowler was sleeping soundly in a corner, but there was no one else in the room except Ikey Bill, who had evidently been awakened from a sound slumber himself, for his eyes were half-closed, and he had the disheveled appearance of a man who had been lying down in his clothes, turning in "all standing," as the sailors say.

"Help me with this trap," he commanded shortly, and Ikey obeyed without a word.

It was a noticeable peculiarity of all the men in Morris Cohen's gang that they were all afraid of him, although physically he was the smallest and weakest among them. But they knew that he possessed the secrets of their lives, and that he could send any or all of them to Sing Sing at any time, if he chose, and that he was likely to do it if there were any insubordination. It was even feared by some of them that he could prove charges of murder against them, and that he therefore actually held their lives in his hands. As for himself, although he was a greater scoundrel than any of them, he was sharp enough to make others do the actual work, so that none of them could bring up anything against him, if it came to a "show down," as Guttersnipe had been heard to remark on one occasion.

Ikey Bill opened the trap, after pushing aside the stove and the square of zinc, and then giving it a quick shove with his heel, sent the trap to the bottom of the hole.

"Hello, down there!" cried the Jew, stand-

ing over the opening and peering down into the darkness.

There was no answer, and the Jew grinned malignantly as he looked at Ikey Bill and said:

"Vonder if they are both asleep. Kind of damp, but they have to get used to it. Bring me that light." He pointed to an incandescent lamp, hanging by a cord from the ceiling, there being a good deal of slack that was coiled up and fastened with a loose knot.

Ikey took hold of the lamp and uncoiled the cord, and the Jew let the powerful electric light down into the sub-cellar. One swift glance around it was enough for him, and then, as he saw it was empty, and that there was a great hole in the sewer-pipe, he fairly danced with rage, as he ordered Ikey Bill to jump down and look for the prisoners.

Ikey Bill hesitated for a moment, and Morris gave him a push, so that he lost his balance, and was obliged to jump into the hole.

"Do as I tell you, vill you?" growled the Jew.

Ikey would like to have protested against this unceremonious treatment, but he knew it would not be safe to do so, and he groped obediently about the sub-cellar, examining every corner, and even crawling a little way along the pipe, in the water, through the hole by which, as we know, the detective and Kate Fairleigh had made their escape. He soon came out, and looking up to the Jew, whose anxious face was peering over the edge of the hole, shook his head.

"V'at?" howled Morris. "Gone?"

"Gone," replied Ikey Bill.

Morris Cohen made it a rule never to go into any place where he would be at the mercy of the gang, because he knew that the desire to get even with him always existed among them, and that they only wanted a good opportunity to carry their desire into effect. But in this case he could not be satisfied unless he went down into the cellar and saw for himself that Cool Bob and Kate Fairleigh had actually got out of his clutches.

He examined a six-shooter and a knife that he carried in convenient pockets, where he could get at them at a moment's notice, and then glancing over at Billy the Bowler to make sure that he was fast asleep he let himself gingerly down into the cellar, keeping one eye on Ikey Bill all the while.

But Ikey evidently did not think this a propitious time for settling accounts with Morris, for he did not offer to do any treacherous act. On the other hand, he seemed really anxious to help the Jew to find the detective. He realized that it was as dangerous to himself as to any one if Cool Bob were to get out into the world with the secret of this retreat in his possession, to use in the interest of law and order, and for the discomfiture of the gentlemen who had particular reasons for keeping out of the way of the police.

The Jew looked all about the cellar and peeped into the pipe, but he was soon convinced that his prisoners had indeed got away from him, even if they had not preserved their lives in their flight.

"I told you v'at it vas, Ikey," he said, at last. "They have gone through this sewer pipe, but I don't think they vill ever go out the other end alive. They can't do it, you know."

Ikey nodded. He had nothing to offer, and he knew by experience that it was safer to say nothing than to hazard a remark that did not coincide with the views of Morris Cohen.

"Vhy, it vas silly to think that they could walk through a place like that, and not be drowned. Vell, let them go. I don't care, so they don't bother me," went on the Jew with a nervous chuckle.

But although he expressed himself so confidently, he was not satisfied. He did not think the detective and Kate could escape that way, but they might, and he would rather have seen their dead bodies, if not their living selves, than to have the uncomfortable feeling that they might turn up at some awkward moment, and make trouble for him when he least expected it.

"Vell, let us get out of this, Ikey. It vas no good our stopping down here to get the grip."

He stepped upon the trap that had been resting on the bottom of the cellar, and touching the rope, it flew up to its place, and he was in the kitchen.

"V'at a joke it would be to let Ikey stay down there for an hour," he thought, with a chuckle. "But I guess I vant to use him, so I will bring him up."

He let down the trap again, and allowed Ikey Bill to come up, and then, as they replaced the zinc and stove, Billy the Bowler stretched himself and woke up.

"What's all this 'ere bloomin' row about?" he demanded, sleepily. "'Allo, Morris, old pal. 'Ave yer come 'ome?"

Morris sneezed violently, for he had managed to catch a cold in the cellar, and the noise he made brought Billy entirely to his senses, and he saw that there was something wrong.

"W'ot's the matter? Any of the coves got nabbed?"

"Vorse than that, and it's all your fault," replied the Jew, who was only too ready to place the blame on any one. "If you had been keepin' vatch, as you should, it would never have happened."

"Well, w'ot 'as 'appened? Come, speak up, give it a name," exclaimed Billy, rather snappishly.

"Why, Cool Bob and Kate has got out. Got away! Gone out of the cellar, after ve had all the trouble to put them there. That's v'at has happened. And you and the other fools right over their heads, and didn't know anything about it," spluttered Morris. "That's v'at has happened!"

This information brought Billy the Bowler to his feet in a hurry, and there was genuine consternation in his face as he rushed up to the Jew and looked into his eyes, as if to make sure that he was telling the truth.

"But 'ow did they get away, and where 'ave they gone?"

"Why, you fool! If I knew where they vas, do you suppose I would be standing here, talking to you? How do I know where they are? I only know that they vas gone, and that ve may have the police down on us at any moment. But mind you," went on Morris, in a wild burst of rage, "if the police find us down here, I'll hand over every one of you I will, so help me. So you'd better find out where they vas, an' bring them back. That's v'at you must do!"

He walked up and down the kitchen, alternatively shaking his fists and pulling at his long hair, like one demented, while Ikey Bill and Billy the Bowler looked on, bewildered.

"Vell, are you going to stand there all day?" suddenly demanded the Jew, stopping in his march to look contemptuously at his two companions.

"W'ot the bloomin' dickens are we to do?" asked Billy the Bowler. "You don't give a cove no chance. W'ot are we to do?"

"Do? Go out and try an' find out what is in the wind."

A thought suddenly struck Morris, and he almost smiled at his own smartness. He beckoned Billy the Bowler to come, and then whispered in his ear.

"S'pose Cool Bob 'appens to be around there," objected Billy the Bowler to some proposition on the part of Morris.

The Jew shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"No fear of that, my tear. All I vant you to do is to go into Vantine's bank with this twenty-tollar gold-piece and ask them to give you paper money for it, because you vant to send it in a letter to your sister in Arizona. See? Then, when you are in the bank, vatch everything, and see whether old Mr. Vantine or young Mr. Vantine is there, and whether Cool Bob or the Serpent are anywhere about."

"Well, you are a bloomin' idiot, Morris. As if the Serpent would be about there. He's a cove as 'as too much sense."

"You can't always tell, my tear. I haven't seen the Serpent since last night, and he's not the sort of man to let a big job slip through his fingers because he has one setback. You do as I tell you, my tear. Keep around the bank all day, if the old man vas there, and then vatch where he goes to when the bank closes, and let me know this evening, my tear."

"Well, where's the bloomin' twenty?"
"Oh, yes, my tear, I'd almost forgotten that," said Morris, as he fumbled in his pockets. "Money is awful scarce, my tear, and I do not think I have twenty tollars. Oh, yes, here is just von piece of money at the bottom of this vest pocket, and it is just twenty tollars. It is all I have, and I didn't know I had that."

Billy the Bowler smiled as the Jew put the money in his hands, and carelessly dropping it in one of his trowsers pockets, he picked up his hat and made for the door.

The Jew lifted up his hands in deprecation of the carelessness with which Billy took the coin, and said something about it being a sin to waste a whole twenty dollars just to find out somethings.

But Billy the Bowler did not care for Morris's bewailings. He opened the door, and in a moment or two found himself in the store, which Mother Rachel had already opened for business, and which was now festooned outside with numerous suits of clothes of more or less gaudy patterns, to be sold to any stranger who might happen to come along with a few dollars in his pocket.

Billy the Bowler walked carelessly away, and up the Bowery, apparently being a young man of leisure, with nothing on his conscience, but keeping a sharp eye for any stray policeman that might come in his way, with the prudent intention of not drawing the official's attention to him, for however innocent Mr. Bowles might be, he found it better not to obtrude his personality on the members of the New York police force.

Morris Cohen followed Billy the Bowler to the store, leaving Ikey Bill to finish his sleep in the lower room, if he pleased, or to spend his time in any other way he liked.

Mother Rachel was busy arranging the trowsers and other garments outside, as aforesaid, and Morris was standing in the shadows of the dark little store, when suddenly a yell of triumph burst from his lips, and rushing into the street, he dragged from behind a garbage barrel no less a personage that Guttersnipe.

The boy tried to drag himself away, but the Jew had him in a tight clutch, and as he pulled him across the pavement and into the store, he was trying with all his might to choke the lad into insensibility.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FOUL BLOW.

WHEN Corden appeared so unexpectedly to Walter Vantine in front of the door that was supposed to be secured, the young man was for a moment too much surprised to speak.

The detective smiled, and, walking forward, took the seat just vacated by the Serpent, and gazed at Walter curiously.

"Walter," he began, and the young man started at hearing himself addressed in this familiar strain by a perfect stranger. The detective noticed the start, and his smile widened a little as he went on: "You did not know that I was so well acquainted with you. Well, you see, in my business, it is necessary for us to know many people who are unaware of the fact."

"Captain Corden," murmured Walter, hardly knowing what he was saying, "I never remember seeing you before."

"Never mind about that. The man who just left you is Jim Daly, otherwise the Serpent?"

Walter nodded.

"Exactly. I know it was the Serpent, and I also know that he is playing the double-cross on you."

"What do you mean, Corden?"

"I mean that he has tightened his clutches upon you until you have no chance to escape, unless you obey my directions, and help me to bring home his crimes to him. I could catch him now for other jobs that I have just been able to trace to him, but, that is not all I want. He has defied me on several occasions, and now I am going to catch him in the very act of carrying out what he intends to be the great act of his life, at Vantine's bank."

The Twister Detective spoke with rather more warmth than was usual with him, but he preserved his imperturbable expression of countenance, notwithstanding.

"Did you overhear all our conversation?"

"Most of it."

"Then you know—"

"I know that you had forged your father's name to a check for \$500, and that it is in the possession of Jim Daly, the Serpent."

"Was in his possession, you mean," interrupted the young man, with a smile, glancing at the ashes of the paper he had destroyed, and which lay in the cigar-ash receiver on the table.

"I said 'is,'" rejoined the detective, quietly.

Walter looked at him in dismay, as if asking for an explanation, and the detective gave it to him still with that quiet smile that was almost maddening to Walter Vantine:

"The Serpent is a slippery one, Walter. You saw and destroyed a check for \$500 on the Vantine bank, and you saw that it was signed by Alexander Vantine?"

"Yes."

"Exactly. That was not the check you signed."

"Not the check I signed?" repeated Walter, bewildered.

"No. As I said before, the Serpent is slippery, and it was no part of his game to let you out of his clutches for an inch or a minute. That confession he got you to sign will be useful to him only in case he gets nabbed, and wants to get his own sentence lightened by giving away his accomplices. See?"

"The double-dyed villain!" gasped Walter.

"Yes, he is just that," acquiesced the detective, cheerfully. "Evidently you know him. So he showed you a check resembling the one you signed, and allowed you to destroy it, keeping the real check in case he may need to use it against you at some future time."

"What am I to do?" asked Walter, despairingly, as he lit another cigar, with trembling fingers, and puffed at it nervously.

"Walter," said the detective, kindly, as he placed his hand on the young man's shoulder, "you have fallen into bad company, and you must pay for your weakness. Trust to me and I think I can keep you out of the Penitentiary. Whether your father will ever thoroughly forgive you I do not know. But, at least he will be more disposed to do so if you prove that you have sincerely repented of your misdeeds, and are trying honestly to repair the mischief you have done."

"I will try," declared Walter, earnestly.

"I am glad to hear you say so. It is no part of a detective's duty to deliver sermons; but I have taken a liking to you, because I do not believe you are bad—only weak, and I am going to try and lead you aright, if I can."

Something in the tone of the detective's voice caused Walter to get up from his chair and take Corden's hand, giving it a hearty squeeze.

"Well, this is enough talk. We must act," observed the detective, as he went to the door by which he had entered, and showed the young man how he had twisted the handle of the door so that it had all given way. "They do not call me the Twister for nothing," he said, with a smile.

He took up a thick poker that lay in the fender, and with his two hands bent it slowly but steadily until it was doubled, the two ends touching. Then he straightened it again in the same manner, Walter watching the feat in silent admiration and astonishment.

A tap at the door through which the Serpent had gone, and Walter opened it, to find the footman outside, who said that Mr. Vantine wished to see Mr. Walter in the library.

As the servant disappeared, Walter looked inquiringly at the detective.

"Go, Walter. I will go, too."

The young man did not understand how the detective intended to explain his presence to the banker, but he did as he was told, for he had implicit faith in his new friend.

Walter found his father seated in his easy-chair, with his feet resting on the fender, facing the door, while opposite sat the Serpent, in his guise of Mr. Harris, composedly smoking, with his back to the door.

The detective followed Walter into the

room, and caught the banker's eye at once, motioning him not to betray any surprise or notice his presence in the room. This was hardly necessary, for Alexander Vantine had never been known to express astonishment in his life, and the fact of the detective coming into the room with his son was enough for him, and he was quite willing to wait for developments.

"Walter, Mr. Harris has assured me that we can feel perfectly safe about the bank at present."

The detective opened his eyes and smiled slightly, but he did not make any remark. The Serpent did not know of his presence, and he had quickly resolved, since coming into the room, that he would not reveal himself. He was quick to form and carry out a plan, and he saw that the large bookcase behind him was open, and that there were heavy curtains before it. He slipped behind the curtains, sitting partly in the bookcase, where he could hear everything that passed without being seen.

At least, it was his purpose not to be seen, but, sharp as he was, he had a man to deal with, in the person of Jim Daly, who was as sharp as the detective.

Strangely enough, Corden had failed to observe a small mirror on the opposite wall, or that the Serpent's face was reflected in it, and that therefore, the detective's face was visible to the Serpent as he entered the room.

Jim Daly was surprised when he saw the detective enter the room with Walter, but he did not permit himself to betray it by a word or look, although his thoughts were whirling in his brain, and he was busy thinking out some plan of escape.

That Cool Bob intended to let him get out of the room except as a prisoner he did not believe for a moment. He realized that his schemes were known to the detective, and he did not doubt that Cool Bob had followed him to this house, and was here to put the nippers on him.

"Smart, but I'll fool him yet!" he thought, as he threw one leg over the other and seemed absorbed in the enjoyment of the good cigar given him by his host. "Cool Bob is no match for the Serpent, whatever he may think."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Harris, for the attention you have given this case. You will keep close watch over the bank for the next few weeks, will you?"

"Certainly. I will place a man there to watch. Although I do not think there is any danger of an attempt being made for a long time, if at all. Still, it is well to be careful. This man they call the Serpent is a determined sort of a fellow, and he might take it into his head to try the bank at any time, don't you see?"

"Well, of all the cool impudence, that is the best I have ever heard," remarked Corden to himself, in his retreat behind the bookcase curtains.

"You are working this case entirely by yourself, I believe, Mr. Harris?"

"Well, no. There is a very bright man on the force of Secret Service men, Captain Corden, who is generally known as Cool Bob, the Twister Detective."

"I have heard of him," observed the banker.

"Yes. He is a useful man, and I have had him working on this matter lately, although he is not following the line I have taken up. In fact there is little rivalry between Cool Bob and me to see which shall take possession of the Serpent. I think I have a little the best of it now, but Bob may get ahead after a while. You cannot always tell."

"Indeed you can't," muttered Corden. "I think, Mr. Serpent, you will find that out before you are much older."

Walter Vantine, who was sitting so that he could look at either the Serpent or Corden, by twisting his eye, glanced from one to the other, and wondered how this farce would end. He had no idea that the Serpent knew of the detective's presence, and was rather amused at the tenor of Daly's remarks, in view of the fact that the detective was sitting immediately behind him, where he could hear every word.

There were a few minutes of silence, as the three—the banker, his son and Jim Daly puffed their cigars, and appeared to be lost

in thought, and then the Serpent arose, picked up his hat from a sideboard and brushed it carefully with his coat-sleeve, never glancing in the direction of the bookcase, although, with the aid of the mirror, he did not miss a single move on the part of the detective, who had drawn himself so far back that only the tip of his nose could be seen between the curtains.

"Well, Mr. Vantine, you shall hear from me to-morrow. I will call upon you—at the bank," said the Serpent, with a slight emphasis on the word "bank" that was not lost on the detective.

The Serpent had a heavy cane that made up his equipment as a solid business man, and he swung it carelessly by the middle as he stood so near to the bookcase that the detective could have touched him, while speaking his farewell words to the banker.

"Very well, Mr. Harris. I shall expect you."

"I will certainly be there."

"I don't know about that," thought the detective.

The banker rung the bell, and the footman appeared to show the Serpent to the front door. The banker was standing with his back to the bookcase, and Walter Vantine had stepped outside the door of the room, intending to speak to the Serpent at the foot of the stairs. This was the opportunity for which Jim Daly had been waiting. Grasping his cane very firmly, he brought the heavily-loaded head of it down with terrible force on the forehead of the detective through the curtains of the bookcase! Then he turned and walked out of the room, bowing and smiling pleasantly at the banker as he did so.

"Good-night, Mr. Vantine."

"Good-night, Mr. Harris."

"Good night, sir. I shall call upon you at the bank."

"Very well, Mr. Harris. Good-night."

And Mr. Harris, *alias* Jim Daly, the Serpent, walked out of the banker's house as comfortably as if he were indeed what he appeared to be, a banker or merchant, with unlimited credit and capital.

Walter was about to follow him downstairs, but his father, with a face from which all the pleasantness that he had bestowed upon Mr. Harris had departed, called him back so peremptorily, that he dared not disobey.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHADOWING.

MR. HARRIS strolled carelessly away from the banker's house, with his cigar between his lips, and walked down-town till he found himself on Broadway, near Thirtieth street.

When he left the quietude and shadows of Fifth avenue and the cross streets, and emerged upon Broadway, he had discarded his gray whiskers and glasses, and had thrown open his Prince Albert coat, so that he looked more like a clubman than the staid, elderly banker he had been while talking to Mr. Vantine.

A stranger, glancing at him as he strolled along, swinging his cane, would have regarded him as one of the petted darlings of society, with plenty of money, and the health to enjoy it. If he had any care, it did not make itself apparent in his face.

And yet he might have been a little bit disturbed had he known that his steps were being dogged, and that every action since he walked lightly down the steps at the banker's house had been noted.

The Serpent was not troubled about the detective. He knew he had given Corden a tap on the head that would prevent his following at once, even if he were not killed outright. The Serpent would not have felt regret if his blow had been fatal, for he had taken too many chances of committing murder in the course of his life, even if he had not actually "killed his man," to attach any particular importance to the crack he had bestowed upon the detective.

He smiled slightly as he thought of how completely he had fooled Cool Bob, and how dexterously he had brought his cane down on the detective's forehead without the action being seen.

"The meddling fool!" he muttered. "He will have to learn more about his business before he is a match for Jim Daly! There isn't one of the crowd that's my match."

And while he was congratulating himself upon the smart way in which he had escaped the trap laid for him by the detective, there were others on his heels, who would pursue him as relentlessly as Cool Bob himself.

He stood for a moment outside a place on Broadway that is now a thing of the past, but that for years was famous all over the country, known as "The White Elephant." It was a *cafe*, saloon, bowling alley, and billiard hall, all under one roof, and was a great resort for clubmen, actors, newspaper men, and men about town. Brilliantly lighted and gorgeously decorated, it was very attractive, and one could be sure of finding any one who was "doing the town" in this place at some time or other during the evening, especially after the theater.

At this time of the evening it was not very well patronized, although there were always a few people in the billiard hall or bowling-alley even as early as this.

The Serpent strolled into the place and looked around and then took a glass of soda water, for he rarely drank any intoxicants, amusing himself afterward by watching a game of billiards in the hall, in which a countrified-looking old fellow was beating a fashionably-dressed young man very badly, and evidently much to his surprise.

Once the countrified-looking old fellow bestowed a slight wink upon the Serpent as he walked around the table to make a shot, a wink that the Serpent returned with quiet gravity, having recognized in the apparent hayseed one of the most expert billiard players in the city, who had just picked up a "sucker," as he would have called him, in the person of the fashionably-attired young man. It was not safe to judge a stranger by his clothes and general appearance in New York.

Although the sharp eyes of the Serpent wandered around the room more than once as he sat on a high chair near the table, he did not get a chance to see two people who were honoring him with their exclusive attention, and who were no other than Barney Doran and Guttersnipe, the boy we first met in the Baxter street dive.

"Hully chee! I'm glad I met you, Barney," the boy was saying, as the two stood behind one of the stout pillars that supported the roof of the billiard hall. "When Morris caught me an' took me inter dat old store on Baxter street, I t'ought I was gone, sure. But it didn't work, fer I guv him der trip wid me foot, an' I laid out der old man an' der old woman, both togedder, an' you couldn't tell which was what while I was gittin' out o' dere like a blue streak."

"Well, be the powers, you are lucky to have got away from that ould sheeny. Faith, Oi should like to give him wan just for luck, an' as fer the ould woman, Oi'd loike to kiss her!"

Barney uttered such a loud laugh at the bare idea of his touching his lips to the face of Mother Rachel that the Serpent started, but as he could not see who had made the noise, he resumed his watching of the game, without troubling himself further about the doings of other people. Or, at least, so it appeared. Perhaps he was paying more attention to his surroundings than he allowed to be seen.

"I found out that the young mug wasn't down dere at Baxter street, anyhow," observed Snipe, in a whisper. "De old man couldn't keep his mout' shut, an' I heerd him send Billy de Bowler ter try an' find out what was goin' on at oder bank, an' ter try ter find out whedder der young feller was about."

"He's all roight, up to his father's house beyant," said Barney. "Oi saw him there, an' Oi just come down here to keep me eye on the Serpent. Oi got a private tip from Cool Bob to watch, an' not let the Sarpent git out of me soight whin he left the house, an' bedad Oi'll do it, d'ye moind?"

"Look out, Barney. Here's Billy der Bowler."

Surely enough, Billy Bowles was just entering the room. The billiard hall was up a flight of stairs from the rest of the establishment, and the boy's quick eye had fallen upon him as soon as the top of his head was above the level of the stairway.

Billy the Bowler glanced around him, and then, as his gaze fell upon the Serpent, he strolled over toward him, and stood in front

of him, as if accidentally, looking at the game of billiards.

"All right, Billy," said the Serpent, in a low tone. "Everything clear, and business good. Sit down here."

Billy the Bowler understood from this peculiar remark that it was safe to be seen talking to Jim Daly, and he dropped into a seat by his side without hesitation.

"What's new, Billy?" asked the Serpent.

"Morris sent me to see 'ow things looked."

"And how do they look?" asked the other, calmly, as he flicked the ashes from his cigar.

"Everything seemed quiet at the bank. The old man 'as been there all day, same as usual, and 'as gone 'ome to get a quiet sleep, I s'pose," grinned the Bowler.

The Serpent did not answer. He made it a rule never to take into his confidence anybody unless it was absolutely necessary for business' sake. In this case, there was no need to tell Billy the Bowler what had taken place at the banker's house, with the fact that the detective had received a crack on the head that might lay him up for a day or two, as the Serpent hoped.

"Where are you going now, Bowler?"

"Back to Baxter street, to see the old bloke. If I don't I suppose he'll want to break my bloomin' 'ead."

"Very likely," observed the Serpent, coolly.

Billy the Bowler leaned back in his chair, with his fingers in the armholes of his vest, while he watched the game of billiards with a critical eye, although really he knew nothing about the game.

It was at this moment something happened which surprised the Bowler, and would have had the same effect upon the Serpent if he had ever allowed himself to be surprised at anything.

Barney Doran fell forward from the back of Billy the Bowler's chair, and lay on Billy's lap, with his head on Billy's shoulders, and his heels wildly kicking about against the Serpent's immaculate shirt front.

The proceeding was so sudden that Billy the Bowler did not know what to make of it, while a slight kick on the Serpent's chest made him swallow a mouthful of cigar smoke, and cough violently.

"Hully chee!" exclaimed Guttersnipe. "What are yer tumblin' all over der mugs for, Barney?"

"What do you think Oi'm doin' it for? Sure me fut shlipped, an' Oi had to tumble somewhere."

By this time the Serpent had recovered himself, and seizing Barney by the collar of his coat, he straightened him up and gave him a shake that made Barney's teeth chatter, and at the same time awakened all his ire.

"Who are yer shovin'?" he demanded, as he planted his fist in the Serpent's chest with so much force as to send him reeling against the countrified-looking old man at the billiard table.

The Serpent recovered his equilibrium at once, and doubling his fist, was about to give back Barney's blow, when a thought seemed to pass through his brain, for he dropped his hand, and walked swiftly to the stairs and down them.

Billy the Bowler was not so prudent as the Serpent, however, for he manifested every desire to have a fight with Barney Doran, as well as with Guttersnipe, and as the boy was nearest, he thought it well to begin with him.

But here he reckoned without his host, for Snipe was as active as a cat, and at the first sign of belligerence on the part of Billy the Bowler, he flew at him, and gave him a stinging blow in his right eye that made him see stars, and put a little deeper color on it. Then, with a quick step backward, he was out of reach, and Billy the Bowler was in a raging passion.

Of course, this had all caused some disturbance, and one of the attendants of the room was making his way to the spot when Billy the Bowler noticed him, and without any further attempt to be revenged on the boy, he went down the stairs after the Serpent, followed by Barney Doran and the boy.

The Serpent did not go out of the house, as Billy supposed he would, but slipped

around to the bowling alleys, which, as it happened were not in use at that particular time. His object was to get out of sight of Barney and the boy, who he had no doubt now were keeping watch on him by somebody's orders, although he did not know who that somebody might be. But he knew that he had the Vantine bank job in his mind, and that there was more than one person suspicious of him in that connection.

He took a seat in a corner, where he would be shielded from the observation of any casual visitor, and waited for the others to leave the place.

"Curse that Irishman," he muttered. "I don't know what he's after, but his being with that boy is suspicious, now that the kid has gone back on the gang. I must get down and see Morris, and arrange this bank job without any more delay. It is getting altogether too hot for me in New York. I want to make my pile, and go abroad for a year or two, for my health."

A sinister smile curled his lip under his black mustache, a smile that turned to a frown, as he saw Barney Doran and Guttersnipe standing at the corner of the room, looking curiously at him.

Neither Barney nor Snipe made any pretense that they were not watching him now. This was Snipe's idea. He said that the Serpent suspected them anyhow, and they might as well give him reason to do so.

The suggestion jumped with Barney's humor, and the two stood, with a stony gaze in their eyes, facing the Serpent, as if they were content to remain there all night.

For a few minutes the Serpent sat, calmly smoking. Then he arose, and looking straight through Barney, pushed Snipe aside carelessly, and walked to the White Elephant's front door.

Billy the Bowler had disappeared, but Barney and Snipe were close upon the Serpent's heels, and did not leave him even when he had gained Broadway, and was watching the crowds going into the three or four theaters in the vicinity.

The Serpent turned around, still with the sinister smile alternating with a frown, and, addressing Barney, remarked, in steely tones:

"If you are within reach of my hand in thirty seconds, I'll kill you. Do you understand?"

Barney was about to make a hot reply, when suddenly, a look of surprise came into his face, and, clutching Guttersnipe by the arm, he turned and was out of sight among the hurrying crowd in a moment.

"Sensible fellow!" muttered Daly, as he strolled into the White Elephant again. "He knew I meant what I said."

But, the Serpent was mistaken. It was not on account of what he had said to Barney Doran, but because he and the boy had simultaneously caught sight of the Twister Detective standing on the other side of Broadway, and motioning to them to let the Serpent alone!

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. HARRIS.

THE detective saw Jim Daly go into the White Elephant, and he smiled sweetly as he did so.

"You are safe enough now, Serpent. I shall know where to find you when I want you. I do not think there is any danger of the bank job being attempted to-night, and I'll make my arrangements to meet your next move, at my leisure."

He raised his finger carelessly, as if he were about to rub his nose, and instantly Guttersnipe was at his side. The boy had been watching for a signal, and was prompt to respond. It was nearly nine o'clock, and the detective knew he would have found the boy at his rooms at that time had he not met him now. As it was, there was no occasion for him go there.

Snipe was about to explain that Walter Vantine had got away from the Baxter street place, but the detective stopped him by informing him that he knew all about it, and it was unnecessary for him to explain.

"Well, if dis yer' mug ain't a wonder," gasped the boy, under his breath.

"Where's Barney?" asked the detective.

"Here Oi am, sorr. An' Oi'm ready for anything."

"Good! I may want you to do some work to-night. Are you heeled?"

"Is it weapons, you m'ane?"

"Yes."

"Indade, thin, Oi ain't got anything but what Oi had whin Oi come into the wurld—the two fists on me. But Oi can use thim, when Oi have to," responded Barney.

"Fists are all right for ordinary occasions, Barney. But when you are dealing with desperate men you must be prepared to use desperate tools."

"An' be gob! That reminds me. Oi hove the bit of a knife Oi tuk from the ould woman. Here it is."

Barney showed the knife with which the reader is already acquainted, and the detective nodded approvingly.

"Don't you use that, unless you are so fixed that you cannot help it," he said, quietly.

Barney was about to reply, when an old lady, neatly dressed in black, with a black veil over her face, stepped between the two men, and whimpered, in a very low tone—so low that the detective was obliged to stoop to catch the words:

"I have lost my pocketbook, and I do not know my way about New York. Could you direct me to the house of Mr. Vantine, the banker? He lives somewhere about here, I believe. I had his address in my pocketbook, but I have lost it, with all my money."

The detective looked keenly into the old lady's face, but it was impossible to distinguish her features through the thick veil, and he could not tell what she looked like.

"I know where Mr. Vantine lives, but I have no time to go with you now."

"If you will only direct me, I will try and find it myself," answered the old lady.

Corden was naturally suspicious, but there was something so honest in the appearance of the old lady, so far as manner and dress can indicate honesty, that he did not feel disposed to dismiss her in the off-hand manner that he would have used to most people who accosted him on the street in this way.

"Perhaps I can find you a guide," he said.

"Thank you," answered the old lady, with an old-fashioned courtesy.

"Oscar," said the detective to the boy.

"Sir," responded the Snipe, who was quick to understand that he was not to disclose his identity.

"Show this lady Mr. Vantine's residence, on Fifth avenue, and then come back. I shall be in the White Elephant."

The gamin could not help expressing a little surprise in his countenance, knowing that the Serpent had gone into the place, and that a meeting between him and the detective could scarcely fail to be exciting, but he had learned that it was necessary to obey orders when they were given by the detective, without saying anything, and he motioned to the old lady, and set off up-town, in the direction of Mr. Vantine's house.

They turned into Fifth avenue, and he noticed that the old lady was a pretty good walker, for he had unconsciously quickened his pace, without appearing to distress her in the least.

"I begin to think I must have struck a female pedestrian," was his mental observation, as he walked still faster.

"I—I—am afraid I shall get out of breath. Can't you walk a little slower?" asked his companion, mildly.

The guide did as he was requested, and nothing more was said until they stood in front of Alexander Vantine's house.

"This is the place," said the street pilot.

"Thank you!"

Nothing could be sweeter or more gentle than the old lady's manner, and it was this that added to the surprise of the lad when suddenly the old lady threw her arms around his neck and held him in so tight a clasp that he could not get his breath.

Snipe exerted all his strength, and managed to loosen the hug of the old lady a little, but he could not cast it off, altogether, and he soon ceased his exertions, while his assailant, finding that the boy was not resisting, allowed him to breathe a little freer.

"Who are you?" asked the gamin, as soon as he could speak. "What do yer want ter pull a feller dis yer' way fer?"

"Because I'm so glad to see you, my tear,"

said a well-known voice that made him shiver, bold as he was generally.

"Morris!" he gasped.

"Yes, my tear, Morris!" said the old lady, as she pulled off her black veil and revealed the sinister countenance of the Hebrew, which did not look any handsomer in a black bonnet, and framed by white hair, made up into ringlets.

"What do you want?"

"I vant you, my tear. Don't you think you ought to vas ashamed of yourself to run away, and make me an' Mrs. Cohen nearly crazy over you, eh?"

As the Jew thus spoke he gave the boy a pinch on the arm that made him cry out involuntarily.

"Let go me arm, will yer?"

"No, my tear, I will not let go your arm. I have run all about New York, looking for you, to-night, and I have got you. I vill hold on to you. That's vat I vill do."

"Quit your fooling!" interposed another voice, which Snipe thought he knew, although he could not connect it with the tall, staid-looking man who was standing at his side, and who had come from he could not tell where. "Take the boy away somewhere, and send him down to the crib, and then come with me."

"How can I?" said Morris. "Who can I send?"

For answer the tall, staid gentleman emitted a low whistle, and Billy the Bowler appeared as suddenly as if he had sprung out of the earth.

"You there, Billy? Where did you come from?" asked the Israelite. "I thought you vas lost, too. You never come back when I sent you to see about that beesness."

"Never mind about that. Here, Billy; take this Snipe down to Baxter street, and take care he doesn't get away again. We have had trouble enough with him."

"Yes, an' you an' de oder mugs will have more trouble before I am t'rough wid yer," muttered the lad.

"Vat you say, my tear?" asked the Jew, whose ears were so quick he never missed anything that was said in his presence.

"Never mind, Morris, what I said. It's noding ter do wid you."

"I'll make it something to do with me," replied the Israelite spitefully, as he pinched the boy's arm again, a little harder than before.

The other man, who had been watching this little by-play impatiently, pulled the boy away and handed him to Billy the Bowler, who took the boy by the collar with a grip that indicated his intention of not losing it again in a hurry.

"That will do. Take him away."

The Bowler dragged Snipe away in the darkness, and then the tall, staid gentleman, who would have been recognized by the banker, had he been there, as Mr. Harris, turned to the Jew and whispered in his ear, in hurried, earnest tones:

"To-night, my tear?"

"To-night? Now!"

"But, my tear, is it safe?" asked the Jew, who had pulled down his veil, and was now as much like an unsophisticated old lady as ever.

"It must be safe. I will make it safe."

"Murtherin' Moses! Vat a man you are!" exclaimed the Jew, raising his hands in his favorite gesture of surprised admiration.

The Serpent did not answer him, and taking him by the arm, led him along Fifth avenue, with the air of a man assisting a feeble old lady, that amused Morris Cohen mightily, although he did not make any remark.

It was not much of a walk before the Serpent stopped in front of the banker's house, and ascending the high flight of steps, rung the bell, drawing the Jew with him.

"My tear, vat are ve going to do?" asked Morris, in considerable trepidation.

"You follow my lead. That is all you have to do."

"All right, my tear. Vhatever you say, goes."

"Of course it does. You should know that by this time."

Five minutes later the two worthies were sitting in the banker's library, with the banker in his favorite attitude, leaning back in his easy-chair. The Serpent could not

help glancing at the bookcase, where were the curtains behind which the detective had been concealed a few hours before, and where he had received a blow on the forehead that the Serpent thought would quiet him for a day or two, but which he had had the evidence of his own eyes had not prevented the detective walking down-town, and appearing on Broadway, as if nothing had happened.

"This is Mrs. Harris, your mother, is it, Mr. Harris?" the banker was saying, as he looked closely at the veiled figure of Morris Cohen.

"Yes, poor old lady. She is not used to company, and therefore she prefers to keep her veil down," explained the Serpent, smoothly.

"Ah!" grunted the banker.

"Doesn't believe it, I can see," commented the Serpent, inaudibly. "I must look out. This is getting dangerous." Then he said, aloud: "I thought I would just drop in as I was passing, to say that I have acquired other information about Jim Daly, the Serpent, and I know now, for certain, that the job will not be attempted for several weeks, at all events. He has taken passage for Europe in an assumed name, and can therefore not be here to operate on the Vantine bank for at least six weeks, and probably not then, because it is to be presumed that he has some business in his line to transact on the other of the Atlantic, or he would not be taking a long sea voyage in such an unpropitious month as February."

"Ah!" grunted the banker, again, with his eyes fixed on the veiled face of the Jew, much to that gentleman's annoyance.

"Where is your son?" asked the Serpent.

"He is down-stairs, Mr. Harris. But I do not think it necessary to trouble him about this matter now, since, as you say, nothing will be attempted for some weeks. I do not approve of talking about it to any one more than is absolutely necessary—not even to my son."

"Very wise, Mr. Vantine."

"Very wise, my tear," burst out from Morris Cohen, who forgot his assumed character for the moment, and spoke in his natural tone.

The banker glanced quickly from one to the other of his visitors as if asking what this meant.

"I thought you spoke, Mrs. Harris," he said, politely.

"She said it was a very wise thing. My mother is rather shrewd, and although of course she does not know anything about the detective business, she often gives me valuable advice, based on her sound common sense," interposed the Serpent, hastily.

"But—I thought she addressed me as 'my dear,' did she not?" said the banker, a slight smile curling the corner of his lip.

"No, Mr. Vantine. She was speaking to me, I think. I am her son, you know. Although," added the Serpent, with a smile, "she might have addressed that endearing appellation to you. She is an old lady, you know, and, having always lived in the country, does not observe the conventionalities as closely as we are accustomed to in the city."

"Vat a gift of gab he vas got, to be sure," thought the Jew, but he did not speak again for a while, and the banker appeared to be satisfied with the explanation of "the great detective, Mr. Harris."

Things were progressing very smoothly, and the Serpent having found out all he wanted to know, that the banker had no suspicion of his own identity, or that there was a plan to rob the bank that very night, was about to take his leave, when there was a diversion that changed things slightly.

Walter Vantine came into the room, rather suddenly, and noticing the Serpent, started, while a frown gathered over his face—a frown that his father saw, although he pretended that he did not.

"Here's Mr. Harris, Walter," observed his father.

"Good-evening, Mr. Harris," said Walter.

"And Mrs. Harris, the mother of Mr. Harris added the banker.

The young man glanced at the old woman, who was making an awkward bow, as she sat in her chair, and then, moved by some impulse that he could not explain, Walter Vantine snatched Morris's bonnet

and veil, and pulled them off, together with the gray wig, revealing the Jew, in all his native hideousness, and with a decidedly bewildered expression on his anything but handsome features.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SERPENT FOILED.

ONE peculiar result of the sudden exposure of the identity of Morris Cohen, in the guise of Mrs. Harris, was that there were three weapons drawn on the instant.

Morris Cohen was taken too much by surprise to do anything but sit in his chair, in a discomfited heap. But the Serpent, who was never known to be nonplused in whatever situation he might find himself, had drawn a six-shooter from his hip-pocket in a moment, and was holding it now, concealed by his hand, so that neither the banker or his son could see it, but ready for instant use, nevertheless. He was a master in the use of the weapon, and could hit a silver dime at a hundred yards at any time, with the pistol held in any position. So, he knew that if occasion should arise, he had his weapon handy for use although appearing to hold it so carelessly.

The banker and his son did not make any attempt to hide either their suspicions or their weapons, but held them in full view.

The Serpent was the first to recover his equanimity. He threw himself into a chair, still with his revolver concealed in the hollow of his hand, and laughed loudly.

"Well done!" he cried. "Well done!"

The Jew looked at him in surprise, while the banker resumed his seat, and waited for the Serpent to go on. As for Walter, he seemed to be ashamed of his precipitation, and leaned over the back of his father's chair, looking at the Jew with almost as much astonishment as Morris himself.

"You see, Mr. Vantine," went on the Serpent. "I wanted to test something."

"Ah!" grunted the banker.

"Yes. This gentleman is Mr. Morris, one of the smartest men on the New York detective force. I found, when I began to run these fellows down, that I must have help."

"Well?"

Mr. Morris is a useful man, but, unfortunately, he is known to all the crooked fraternity—"

"Yes, indeed, my tear," broke in Morris.

"The Ser—I mean, Mr. Harris, speaks the Bible truth, he does. I vas known to them all, I vas. So help me!"

"So I got Mr. Morris to assume a disguise, and I wanted to see whether it was a good one. I thought it would be a good idea to bring him up here, and see whether you had any suspicions that he was anything but an old lady."

"Ah!" grunted the banker, again.

"But my impetuous young friend, Walter, spoiled it before I had a thorough opportunity of finding out whether there was anything in the appearance of my mother, Mrs. Harris, to suggest Mr. Morris, the detective. Do you see?"

"I see," nodded the banker.

"So, now, having finished my talk with you, Mr. Vantine, I will go down-town, and see that the Serpent really is making his preparations to go away."

"Yes, ve may as vell go away," said the Jew, who seemed rather anxious to get out of the house, now that his disguise had been torn from him.

"I will walk a little way with you," observed Walter, in obedience to a sign from his father—that was noticed by the Serpent, however, although the banker did not know it.

"Very well, Walter. Don't stay out late," said the banker, as the three left the room and the house.

They walked for perhaps two blocks before any of the three spoke. Walter was between the Jew and the Serpent, who, it might have been observed, kept very close to him. Could it be possible that they were afraid of his trying to escape from their fascinating company? It certainly might have been supposed so.

They had reached a quiet corner, where no one was passing save an occasional group of young men on their way down-town, a beggar or two, and here and there one of those shabby-genteel figures that are all too common in the upper part of the metropolis,

as if the poor fellows who do not know where to get their next meal or a bed, like to keep near the people that have all the comforts and luxuries of life.

The Serpent looked up and down, and then, bending his face down so that his lips were close to Walter's ear, he whispered:

"The job has to be done to-night!"

The young man started, as if he would have run away, but the Serpent caught him by the arm in an iron grip, and detained him.

"Don't be idiotic, Walter Vantine. You know that I have you, now, just where I want you, and that you must help us with this thing."

"You scoundrel!" hissed Walter.

"Don't be uncomplimentary, Walter, because when you say anything about me, in the way of 'scoundrels,' you are talking about yourself. We are all in the same business, you know."

"Yes, all in the same business, my tear," put in the Jew.

"What am I to do?"

"Very simple. Take us into the bank."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse," rejoined the Serpent, with his ugly smile.

"How do you know?"

"Because you could not save yourself. I have your confession."

The young man laughed, scornfully.

"Of what use would that be if the bank is not robbed? That very fact would prove that it was forced from me under fear of my life."

"Or fear of disgrace."

"Ha, ha! But you have overreached yourself this time, Mr. Daly. The paper that might have disgraced me is destroyed."

"Is it?" said the Serpent, significantly.

"Certainly it is. Did I not burn it myself, before your eyes?" asked Walter, looking closely into the Serpent's face to see whether he suspected that the young man of the trick that had been played upon him.

"You are a pretty smart young man, Walter Vantine, but you are not a match for Jim Daly. The check you burned was not the one you forged. I have that quite safe, and can produce it if it is required, at any time."

Although Walter could not repress a slight shiver when he found how accurately Cool Bob had read the scheme of the Serpent, he pretended to be surprised, and then said, doubtfully:

"I do not believe you. Show me the check."

The Serpent put his hand to the inside pocket of his long Prince Albert, which in his character of Mr. Harris, he wore closely buttoned, when he felt a tug at his coat-tails, and met the eager gaze of Morris Cohen, who had been keeping a wary eye on the young man.

"I guess it isn't necessary to show it to you, Walter. I have it. That should be enough for you. But, I promise you, that when this job is done, I will know it is the right one. Moreover, when the whole affair is over, and I am out of the reach of the police of New York, I will send you your confession, as well, so that you will be doubly safe. And I am a man of my word."

"Indeed he is, my tear. You may know that when the Serpent says anything, he means it. I would trust him anywhere," added the Jew, in whining tones that he meant to be convincing.

Walter could hardly restrain his disgust, and Morris Cohen was within a hair's breadth of receiving a very vigorous thump, but he did not get it, because Walter recognized that it would be foolish to have a row now. He must appear to acquiesce, and save the bank, as well as his own honor, at the same time—if he could.

What worried Walter was to know what had become of the detective. He had not seen him since he left the house, after declaring that he had accidentally knocked his head against the corner of the bookcase—raising a rather serious wound for so slight a blow as he said it was by the way—and he felt that he needed his advice sorely now. Where could the detective be?

Perhaps the Serpent and Morris Cohen were thinking the same thing. But if they were, they did not betray it in their manner. On the contrary, they appeared to be per-

fectly satisfied with the appearance of everything, and as if their only desire was to reach the bank as soon as possible.

They walked swiftly, with Walter between them, and soon they stood on the corner opposite the bank while the Serpent and Morris reconnoitered.

"Now, Walter, you have a key of the front door. Open it and let us in. Morris, you will stay out here. I do not know that an outside watch is absolutely necessary, but I never neglect precautions."

"All right, my tear. It is only a little after ten o'clock, and no one will suspect a poor old lady, who was looking out on the street from the doorway. They will only think I was the housekeeper."

As the Jew spoke, he went up the steps of a handsome residence opposite the bank, and stood in the shadow of the doorway, where he could not be discerned unless he was looked at very closely, and where, as he said, a casual glance would suggest only that he was a housekeeper or upper servant who had stepped outside the door for a breath of the keen, wintry air.

"But, if I go into the bank, what are you going to do?" asked Walter.

"I shall go with you."

Walter did not reply, but passed up the steps to the bank, and tapped gently.

"What is that for?" asked the Serpent.

"Has your father put on another watchman?"

"Certainly. You do not suppose he would leave the bank entirely unprotected, do you?"

The door was unlocked and unbolted from the inside with considerable noise, and a man's face appeared in the opening, the eyes looking inquiringly and suspiciously at the two men outside.

"It is I—Walter Vantine," said Walter.

The watchman did not say anything, but swung the door wide open, so that Walter and the Serpent could pass in.

"This is a detective," observed the young man, in a low tone, without looking at the watchman. "He is to stay here all night, and I mean to keep him company."

The Serpent dragged Walter out of sight of the watchman, and muttered:

"If you are not doing the square thing, look out!"

"I am."

"You were to let us into the bank with a pass-key, and now I find a watchman here. Who is he?"

"I do not know. My father hired him. All I know about him is that he must have come well recommended, or he would not be in this building."

"We must get him out of the way."

"You will have to do it yourself. I have fulfilled my part of the contract in letting you into the bank. I did not bargain to commit murder, or do violence, and I will not do it," replied the young man, coolly.

The Serpent looked over in the direction of the watchman, who, with his gray hair and whiskers, and his rather bent form, did not look a likely man to count much in a fight. He had sunk into a chair near the front door, and appeared to be dozing.

"Now is the time," muttered the Serpent.

Like a cat he crawled over the floor toward the old watchman, and pausing behind him, as he sat with his head drooping over upon his breast, and his breath coming and going in deep and regular cadence, raised a small blackjack with murderous intent.

It seemed as if nothing could save the unconscious man, when, just as the blackjack had actually begun to descend, he swung around in his chair, and, without any apparent exertion, caught the weapon in his right hand, and twisted it out of Jim Daly's grasp so suddenly and vigorously as to make the Serpent fairly cry out with pain.

"What's the matter?" yawned the watchman, seemingly half asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOWLER CAUGHT NAPPING.

WHEN Billy the Bowler marched Guttersnipe down-town with his hand on his collar he realized that he had rather a troublesome job on his hands. He could not hold the boy all the way down-town without exciting comment, and yet he was afraid to let him go for a moment, for the youngster was as slippery as an eel, as he well knew.

Guttersnipe appreciated the advantage he had over Billy the Bowler, and he was grinning to himself as he saw the embarrassment of his enemy.

"Say, Bowler, we ain't going to walk it all der way down to der Bowery and Baxter street, are we?" he asked, with a short laugh.

"Shut up, yer young snipe, or I'll break yer bloomin' frontispiece," growled Billy the Bowler.

"What good would dat do yer? Der Serpent would smash yer if yer did any damage ter me now. I'm his property, don't yer know, an' yer has ter handle me wid care, an' don't yer forgit it," was Guttersnipe's cheerful response.

Billy the Bowler recognized the force of this argument, and he stood still for a moment to collect his thoughts, which were never particularly clear, and were more confused now than usual.

"I s'pose I'll have to get a bloomin' cab, an' then that old sheeny will make me pay for it. 'Owver, there ain't nothing else I can do, blow it!" muttered Billy.

Guttersnipe's ears were very sharp, and he caught the purport of his companion's half-spoken observations, and enjoyed his discomfiture with a keenness that was natural to him, in whatever situation he might find himself.

"Goin' ter ride us down in a cab, eh? Well, dat's der right way ter take a gentleman," laughed the boy. "Here's a cab, right here. Shall I call it?"

"Shut up, while yer safe," growled Billy. "I'd give a dollar ter knock yer bloomin' head off."

"Couldn't be done at der price," responded Snipe. "Make it a hundred, spot cash, an' I'll go yer."

The Bowler did not reply to this badinage, but held up his hand as a signal to the driver of a hansom cab that was passing, and the vehicle drew up to the curb.

Billy took the boy with a firmer grip on the collar, and shoved him into the cabin in a very unceremonious manner, the driver watching the proceeding without appearing to see anything particularly strange in it.

"Kid trying to run away from his folks?" he asked, carelessly.

"Yes," grunted Billy. "Drive down the Bowery to Baxter street."

"All right."

The Bowler was seated in the cab by this time, and had wedged the boy tightly into a corner with his knee, so that he could let go of his collar.

There was some delay in the starting of the cab, and Billy was trying to figure out how he could push up the little flap over his head to see what the matter was without risking the loss of his charge, when the horse turned around and the cab bowled rapidly down Fifth avenue.

"I'll soon have you safe in the bloomin' crib, an' then I'll be done with yer," grunted Billy, as he looked at the innocent Snipe up in his corner, where he was apparently trying to get a nap.

It may be interesting to the reader to know what caused the delay in the starting of the cab. The fact is that there was a change of drivers. The cabman took the Bowler's direction, and was about to whip up his horse, when a man sprung upon the footboard by his side and whispered in his ear.

"Hollo, Barney. That you?"

"Whist!" returned Barney Doran, for he it was. "Don't give it away. Oi'll take this fare, an' you can go an' git a slape. Oi've been aff all day, an' Oi'm ready to go to wurrk."

"Glad to hear it. This is your cab anyhow, but I was afraid you would not show up till the morning."

"Well, Oi had some business av me own, but it's done now, an' you can have the benefit av me bein' here."

The other man needed no persuading to get out of the seat, and resign the reins to Barney. He had been at work since early morning, on account of Barney's unusual absence, and was only too happy to be released. He did not know that there was anything out of the way with his fare, or that Barney had any more reason for wanting to drive them than to make the money he would get out of the job.

So, just as Billy the Bowler, inside the

cab, was preparing to push up the flap, Barney took charge of the cab, and drove in a down-town direction.

"Begorra! Oi do stroike luck sometimes," he muttered, as he drove down-town in a business-like way.

Billy the Bowler was in blissful unconsciousness that his enemy was handling the reins over his head, and Guttersnipe was so busy trying to devise some plan of escape that he did not think anything about the cabman. He was thinking about Barney, but he had no idea that his Irish friend was so near. If he had there would have been a lively time for the Bowler right there and then.

Billy kept a watchful eye on the boy, for he had had experience of the slipperiness of that young gentleman, and he was determined that neither Morris Cohen nor the Serpent should have cause to complain of his negligence.

As for Barney, he was thinking pretty steadily of what he was to do. Although he knew that the expected destination of the cab was the Baxter street dive, he had no intention of going there, and his only desire was to think out some plan by which he could get the Bowler safely into the hands of the detective.

"Be Paddy Murphy's ghost, if the captain was only here now, Oi'd be saved all further trouble. Be meself Oi don't know what to do, 'cept that Oi won't let this t'ief av the wurld get away from me. Oi must let thot b'ye know who's droivin' him, somehow, an' then p'rhaps he'll be helping me to fix things. Oi'd as soon hove thot kid as mony a man Oi know. Be gob, he's as sharp as a black-thorn, an' just about as tough."

As he paid this compliment to the lad, he carefully raised the flap in the roof of the cab and looked down.

Billy the Bowler had lighted a large and very strong cigar, and was puffing a cloud of rank black smoke that caught Barney full in the mouth and nostrils as he raised the lid. The consequence was that he sneezed and coughed violently immediately over the head of Billy the Bowler.

"What the bloomin' deuce are you doin' up there?" demanded the Bowler, as Barney let the flap fall with a loud clap. The Bowler emphasized his inquiry by poking up the flap with his cane, so that he could see Barney still coughing and choking, while the horse, temporarily released from the guiding hand of the driver, was wobbling about the street in a very undignified manner; suggestive of a man who had visited too many saloons for his health.

"What's the matter, eh?" repeated Billy.

"Phwat's thot?" asked Barney, between his spasm of coughing.

"I asked you what made yer open this flap and cough on me bloomin' 'ead," returned Billy.

"Phwy, Oi was goin' ter ask you phwere Oi was ter droive yer to, thot's all."

"I told yer, Baxter street."

"But you didn't tell me phwat number."

"What a lovely brogue that chump's got all at once," muttered Snipe, to himself. "He didn't talk dat way when we got inter der cab."

"Never mind about the bloomin' number," exclaimed the Bowler, impatiently. "Get us down to Baxter street, an' I'll show you the house."

"Well, don't blame me if I take you past the place," grumbled Barney, still holding the flap open.

"Go to the devil!" roared the Bowler, impatiently, as he pulled at his big cigar.

"Phwere shall Oi find him—in Baxter street?" persisted Barney, who had his own reasons for prolonging the conversation.

"You'll find him right in the cab, if you don't shut up and drive on," retorted Billy the Bowler, threateningly.

Barney did not answer, but he placed his face close to the little opening, and grinned at Guttersnipe. The boy gave an answering snicker, and Barney knew that he was recognized.

"Oh, Fourteenth street," said Snipe, as he yawned loudly, as if he had been half asleep.

"What's that?" asked Billy, quickly, his suspicions aroused in a moment. "What did you say about Fourteenth street?"

"Oh, give us a rest! I was just a-dream-

ing about a mash I used to have down dere. Dat's all. Can't a feller dream in this cab?"

"Not out loud," replied Billy, as he gave the boy a smart rap on the head with his cane.

Guttersnipe was only a boy, but he was hot-tempered, and when the Bowler hit him with his cane he shot out his small bony fist and gave his burly companion a bang in the chin that made all his teeth rattle, while Barney, who was looking on, laughed heartily, but silently.

"You young skunk!" spluttered Billy, in a passion. "You'll hit me in the bloomin' jaw, will yer?"

With these words he struck the lad on the cheek with his open hand, and immediately there was a first-class fight in progress in the narrow confines of the cab. The small space proved an advantage to the boy, for Billy the Bowler had no room to strike with full force, while the lad, being small and nimble, got under his big assailant's guard, and gave him several good hard punches that did Guttersnipe's heart good, in proportion to the discomfiture of Billy the Bowler.

How the struggle would have ended, it is impossible to say, although probably with the ignominious defeat of Guttersnipe, if Billy had not seen that the fracas had attracted the attention of a six-foot policeman, who was making his way to the cab as fast as he could run.

"Drive on, quick!" shouted the Bowler to Barney. "Here's a cop coming over."

Barney did not want to have his fare arrested at that moment, because he did not know how it would agree with the plans of the detective, so he whipped his horse and bowled away down Fifth avenue at a pace that would have given the policeman a sharp race had he attempted to follow. Like a sensible man, however, he decided that the offense of fighting in a cab was not serious enough to demand that he should run half-a-dozen blocks at the top of his speed, so he let it go, and sought the back door of a saloon for a comforting nip of something hot and strong that was just what he considered he wanted for a February night.

Barney soon turned into Broadway, and drove down that thoroughfare at a good speed till he reached Union Square. He turned around the end and into Fourth avenue. He was thinking of what the boy had said about Fourteenth street, and he was satisfied that it was not a dream, but a wide-awake hint to him that was meant.

Billy the Bowler had been trying to be very vigilant, but after his struggle with the boy, he felt a strong desire stealing over him to take a nip. He had taken several nips of strong drink during the night to keep the cold out and to brace him up for his work, as he would have explained himself, and this, together with the exertion of struggling with the boy in the cab, had made him very tired.

"I'll have to keep awake, though," he muttered. "This kid is on the lookout for a chance to get out of the bloomin' cab, and if he ever gets away, it will be all day for me with the Serpent and Morris Cohen, and they know too much about me for me to take any chances. Yes, I must keep awake."

His strong cigar was still between his lips, but he had let it go out. He lighted it again, and puffed away determinedly for a few minutes, but still the insidious slumber crept over him.

"Maybe this cigar makes me sleepy," he thought, and the cigar was thrown out into the street. He looked at the boy, who was apparently sleeping away in the corner. Certainly he was snoring in a manner that would have done credit to any sleeper.

Billy shook him violently, but the Snipe was too far gone to be affected. A slight grunt, and then he fell over into his old position again, like a bag of rags.

"Dunno whether he is shamming or not, but I shall keep awake anyhow. It won't take long to run down to Baxter street from here."

He looked out, and saw that they were passing along Union Square, and he was satisfied with the look of things generally. So he leaned back in the cab to cogitate on what Morris and the Serpent meant to do with the boy, and when that bank job

was to be done, and what new work there would be for him when this bother with Guttersnipe was over, and while thinking of all these things, *he did just what he had made up his mind not to do—fell fast asleep.*

Guttersnipe remained perfectly quiet for at least five minutes after he felt certain that his guard was asleep, while the cab went deliberately down Fourth avenue. Then, when he was satisfied that there was not the slightest danger of the Bowler waking, he carefully pulled himself out of the corner into which he had been wedged, and, pushing up the flap in the roof of the cab, called softly to Barney.

CHAPTER XXI.

EXIT BILLY THE BOWLER.

BILLY THE BOWLER snored unconsciously during the performance of Guttersnipe. When the burly tough once got to sleep he slept soundly, and it required something extraordinary to wake him. Guttersnipe knew this, but he felt that it would not be safe to take any chances, so he was very cautious in his communication with Barney.

As soon as the boy whispered through the trap Barney bent his head so that his ear was within two inches of the boy's mouth, and grunted: "Phwell?"

"That you, Barney?"

"Indade it is. Who else should it be?"

"Well, der mug's asleep."

"Good! Now, phwat?"

"Drive along East Fourteenth street till I tell you to stop."

"You're a cheeky kid. But, be gob, you know more than lots of men," was Barney's response, as he obediently turned his horse around and made his way to Fourteenth street.

"Drive slow," directed Snipe, as they turned into Fourteenth street.

"Give yer ordhers."

"You kin bet dat's what I'm doin'. I'm running dis shooting match," was the cool reply of the gamin.

Guttersnipe had his reasons for going along Fourteenth street at a deliberate pace, as will appear later.

When they reached Third avenue, the boy looked carefully at the houses, and suddenly whispered to the driver to stop.

Barney pulled up, and the boy watched Billy the Bowler anxiously, to see whether the stopping of the vehicle had disturbed him in his sleep. The burly fellow moved slightly, and grunted something, but he did not wake up. Perhaps it was as well for him that he did not, for Guttersnipe had possessed himself of Billy's heavy cane, and had made up his mind to bestow a whack on the Bowler's head that would have made him sleep a little sounder for an hour or two.

As soon as he saw that his companion was safe, the boy stepped carefully over him, and leaped out of the cab.

"Dat's enough of cab-riding for me, Barney," observed the boy, as he looked up at Barney with a grin.

"Phwat are we goin' ter do here, Snipe?" asked Barney.

"I'll show you direckly," answered the lad. "Don't be in a hurry. What are we goin' ter do with dat mug in der cab? I'd like to put him somewhere where he would be safe. He makes himself too numerous. I've got der idee," he exclaimed, with a broader grin than ever on his face.

"An' phwat is it?"

Snipe stepped up on the bar at the back of the cab, so that he could whisper to Barney, and explained the plan:

"He's dead asleep, an' he don't know where he is. You start up der horse, and drive like the deuce down the street, from side to side, and make a great yellin'."

"Phwell?"

"Hully chee! How dumb some mugs are!" exclaimed the boy, in a disgusted tone. "Don't yer see? He'll wake up wid der racket, an' he won't know what's goin' on. But he'll t'ink der horse has run away, an' dat he'll be smashed up. He won't be wide awake ter remember dat I ought to be wid him, an' he won't care a cent. All he'll want will be ter git out. See?"

"Faith, Oi begin ter see."

"Do yer? Smart, you are! I didn't think you could see anything without a telescrip," responded the boy, with bitter sarcasm, that was all lost on Barney, however. "Well,

when he gets good and scared, you slack up a little, and yell ter him ter jump. Tell him you can't hold der horse, an' if he wants ter save his life now's his time."

Barney gave vent to a hoarse laugh in his enjoyment of the scheme.

"Shut yer music-box, will yer!" cried the boy, in disgusted tones. "What der yer want ter let a cackle like dat out of yer for. It sounded like a car off der track. Ain't yer got no sense?"

"I forgot," answered Barney humbly, for he began to think the diminutive individual by his side was gifted with more than human powers and he respected him accordingly.

"Well, yer want ter remember. I hate ter see a mug make a cussed fool of himself just when dere's work ter be done."

"I won't do it ag'in, Snipe."

"Mind yer don't. Now, drive away, an' when you've spilled der mug, come right back here."

"All roight!"

The gamin stepped down to the sidewalk, and leaned against the fence attached to the house like others on Fourteenth street in that neighborhood. Barney turned his horse around, and with a whoop sent the horse dashing down the street, at a tearing gait.

One or two sleepy policemen who were strolling along or sitting in the back rooms of saloons heard the noise of the wheels and the rattling of the horse's hoofs, but they supposed it was some young fellows out for a lark, and they did not trouble themselves to give chase, so long as there was no damage being done.

"Dat's der most sensible t'ing dat mug has done yet," commented Guttersnipe to himself, as he watched the cab, and saw that Barney was obeying his directions, and driving from one side to the other. "Gosh! he'll turn dat cab over first t'ing he knows, an' den dere will be a spill, sure enough. He's a-goin' it."

Barney was indeed carrying out his instructions. The cab bumped and jumped, and swerved from one side to the other, and it would have been a miracle indeed if even such a sound sleeper as Billy the Bowler could have slumbered in it.

A particularly pronounced bump, and a sudden twist of the cab sent him flying from one side of the seat to the other, and his head came in contact with one of the window-frames with a crash that brought him into a state of partial wakefulness, while at the same time confusing the few ideas he possessed.

"What the bloomin' jumpin' Jerusalem is this?" he growled, as another twist of the cab banged him against the other side, and shook him up so that his ribs felt as if they were being hammered with a base-ball bat.

Barney heard this remark through the trap in the roof, and he grinned as he laid the whip on his horse lightly and gave him another pull to one side.

Billy the Bowler by this time realized that he was in a cab, although he had forgotten all about Guttersnipe and his mission to convey him to the Baxter street crib. He was being hustled so lively that it would indeed have been a wonder if he had any clear idea of anything except his present predicament.

A few more bumps, harder than ever, made him try to get to his feet, as he pushed the doors of the vehicle open.

He tried to cry out to Barney, but his breath was all gone, and he could only gasp and try to hold on. Suddenly, he distinguished the voice of the driver over his head.

"Jump out! Oi can't hould him! He's got cl'ane away from me!" he heard Barney say, through the jolting and rattling of the cab and the irregular trampling of the horse's hoofs.

There was no cessation of the swerving of the cab, which kept on dashing from side to side as if possessed by a thousand fiends. But Billy the Bowler had got it firmly fixed in his head that his play was to get out, and he was not disposed to neglect what he conceived to be his plain duty.

He could not jump out while the horse and cab were performing such peculiar gyrations, however, and he leaned forward, holding on tightly the while, until he could see a good chance to get out.

"Look out below there," cried Barney. "Oi'll thry to pull him up a little just so as yez can jump out, an' yez don't want to waste any toime about it, neither."

"I won't!" responded Billy the Bowler.

Barney grinned to himself, for he had taken care never to lose control of his horse through all the dashing down the street, and he pulled suddenly and firmly on the reins, so that the cab actually stopped, all in an instant.

Billy the Bowler hardly needed to jump, for the jerk threw him bodily out of the cab, and if he had not been pretty active, he would have gone on his head, which, it may be remarked, was the benevolent desire of Barney Doran. But Billy was too quick in his movements for that, and he dropped on his feet, in a very dazed and shaken up condition, while Barney, turning his horse swiftly, went back toward the place at which he had left Guttersnipe, at a good pace, but not racing so wildly as he had been doing for Billy the Bowler's benefit.

The Bowler stood in the same spot for perhaps ten minutes before he could collect his ideas at all, and then, as he realized that he had lost Guttersnipe and his cane, it began to dawn upon him that he had been the victim of a conspiracy, although he could not, for the life of him, understand how it had been carried out.

"That bloomin' kid is a near relation to Old Nick, I'm sure," he muttered. "Now, what am I goin' ter say to Morris and ter the Serpent? They'll have me in the Tombs, in revenge, as sure as my name is Bowles." He stood in silent cogitation for a little while longer, and then he made up his mind what to do.

"I'll just gird up my bloomin' loins and go ter Chicago. I may be able ter find a job or two ter do there, an' I'll be out of the way of the Serpent an' Morris till this thing blows over. They'll say I'm a chump, an' no use to 'em, an' I know what that means. They will just give me away ter the police in their sneaking way, an' that will be the last of Billy the Bowler for a stretch. I don't want to spend the next ten years at Sing Sing, an' I don't mean ter do it if I can help it."

As Billy the Bowler will not appear again in this narrative, it may be well to say here that he kept to his resolution. He had plenty of money in his pockets, and he took an early morning train for Chicago.

While the Bowler was making his arrangements, as he stood where Barney had dumped him out of the cab, Barney himself was driving rapidly away to rejoin Guttersnipe.

As he neared the spot, which he had carefully noted before driving away, he uttered an expression of mingled surprise and admiration.

"Be jabbers! That b'ye is a wonderful gossoon! If he hasn't made a mash, may Oi never see ould Ballygooran an' me ould mither ag'in."

Sure enough, Guttersnipe was leaning over the iron fence, in earnest conversation with a young woman, who seemed deeply interested in what he was saying to her.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN AWFUL SURPRISE.

WE must return to the Vantine Bank, where we left several of our friends ready for business according to their respective ideas of what constituted it.

The Serpent had received a rather surprising set-back when the watchman repelled his attack so suddenly and effectively, and for a moment he stood watching the old man, as he leaned back in his chair yawning and stretching, as if unaware that he had given the Serpent such a surprise.

"Well, that is only one more argument in favor of clearing the bank of every one who is likely to interfere with the work," muttered the Serpent.

"What did you say?" asked Walter, carelessly, from his seat on the sofa, in the private room of his father.

The Serpent stepped over to him, and whispered fiercely in his ear:

"There seems to be some sort of treachery here. That watchman is one too many for us."

"So it seems," was Walter Vantine's imperturbable comment.

"Yes. Well, he must be put out of the way. And, if I see any sign that you are not doing the square thng, look out for yourself!"

Jim Daly spoke savagely through his set teeth, and at the same time he drew a formidable-looking bowie-knife from a pocket inside his coat and flashed it before the young man's eyes.

The young man did not wince, but if the Serpent had not had his back turned toward the watchman, he might have seen that the old man made a sudden start forward at the appearance of the knife, as if half inclined to interfere. But he didn't. The Serpent dropped the hand holding the knife to his side, and the watchman, as if satisfied that there was no immediate likelihood of a deadly assault upon the young man, sunk into his chair again, in his former listless manner, but with his eyes bent sharply upon the other two, notwithstanding.

"You hear what I say?" hissed the Serpent.

"I hear you," returned the young man, coolly.

"And you are in the job with us?"

"How can I help it? You say you have me in your power, and you ought to know."

"And so I have, curse you!" growled the Serpent, as he put his knife out of sight.

"That's nice language to use to a fellow that is supposed to be your pal in an important job like this," said Walter, still in the same bantering tone.

The Serpent bent a fierce glance upon the young fellow, as if he would like to have burned a hole through him, but Walter took no notice of it save to smile in a careless manner that was almost maddening to the other, because he did not know what to make of it.

The Serpent kept up a bold front, because it was natural to him, but he was in a quandary, for he did not know how to dispose of this watchman. He had discovered that the old man was much stronger than might have been supposed, and he feared that in a hand-to-hand struggle with him, the watchman would at least contrive to make so much noise that he would attract attention outside, and the result might be the interference of police, and the capture of himself, as well as the defeat of his purpose to rob the bank.

He could not expect much assistance from Walter Vantine, that was clear, for the young man did not seem to be as much afraid of him as he had been, and might refuse to help him altogether, for anything he could tell.

There was the vault before him, but he did not know the combination, and it would be a tremendous job to force it, even if he had felt disposed to do so. No! Walter Vantine must be made to reveal it to him, or—

He did not finish the thought, but abruptly let his hand fall upon the hilt of his bowie-knife, signifying to himself what would be the consequence to Walter in case of his continuing obstinate.

"Walter," he said, at last, in a low tone, so that the watchman should not hear.

"Well?"

"Will you show me the combination?"

"Certainly. That is what I am here for, is it not?" was the young man's unexpected response.

The Serpent was suspicious, and this ready acquiescence seemed to him as ominous as a direct refusal.

"Um! It was understood that you were to do it, but I thought—"

"That I was going back on my word!" interrupted Walter. "Did you ever know me to do that?"

"You wouldn't help me with the old man over there," said the Serpent, nodding his head in the direction of the watchman.

"There is a difference between doing a job in a bank for money and committing murder, or even a murderous assault!"

"Burn my heart if I can understand your nice distinctions," grumbled the Serpent. "But something has to be done with him, or he'll spoil everything."

"I'll get him out of the way."

"You?" cried the Serpent, in greater astonishment than ever.

"That's what I said."

"Well, if you ain't worse than a Chinese

puzzle!" And the breathless manner in which the Serpent made this remark, showed that he meant what he said.

The young man made no reply, but stepping over to the watchman, he shook him roughly. The only response was a snore. The old man had dropped into a sound slumber.

"That will do," exclaimed Jim Daly. "If he is asleep, I can fix him myself."

He was moving toward the watchman again, when Walter Vantine turned on him savagely, in a way altogether different from the coolness he had displayed ever since coming into the bank.

"Touch this old man, Jim Daly, and I'll kill you!" he hissed, as he drew a six-shooter and held it with the muzzle in the Serpent's face.

The Serpent started back, and, with a shrug of his shoulders, went into the private room and threw himself upon the sofa.

Walter replaced his pistol in his pocket, and shook the watchman again, who awoke immediately and looked inquiringly into the young man's face.

Walter whispered a few words in his ear, and he walked to the front door and stepped outside, the young man closing the door after him and shooting one of the heavy bolts.

The Serpent started up.

"Oh, no, Mr. Walter. *That* won't do! You must think I'm a fool. Do you suppose I don't see through such a transparent trick as that?"

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Why, that you have sent that old man after the police, and that you think I am to be caught like a rat in a trap. That's what I mean."

"Jim Daly, I begin to think you *are* a fool. As if I couldn't have put the police on you any time to-day, if I had thought fit to do so. Look out of this window, and you can see whether the old man has gone after the police."

The Serpent went to the window and looked out. There stood the watchman on the steps in the doorway, with his overcoat, that he had worn loose while in the bank, buttoned tightly around him. He was standing leaning against the door-post, in a listless attitude, as if waiting till he should be summoned inside. Across the street, in the doorway of the big residence, the Serpent could descry the form of Morris Cohen, in his feminine garments, watching the bank patiently, and perhaps wondering why the old man had stepped outside.

"Satisfied?" asked Walter.

The Serpent was *not* quite satisfied, but he said he was, and that was enough for Walter.

"Now to business," said Walter.

The young man seemed to be as eager to help as he was reluctant a few minutes ago, as he stepped over to the vault and began to turn the combination knob, the Serpent alternately looking at him and glancing out of the window to make sure that the watchman was still there.

The young man worked away at the combination, but somehow he was not able to open the door.

"This is strange. I'm sure that I have the right combination, for I closed the door to-day, with my father looking over my shoulder, and there has been no one to change it since."

The Serpent fingered his bowie-knife as he asked, suspiciously:

"You are not playing any double game on me, are you, Walter Vantine? It will be a bad thing for you, if you are."

The young man tossed his head impatiently, as he replied:

"Jim Daly, I never break my word. I tell you that I set the combination to-day, and that I am doing the best I can to open it."

The Serpent forgot all about the watchman outside now, in his eagerness to get the great swinging door of the vault open. He bent over Walter, watching him as he turned the knob backward and forward, and at last broke in, impatiently:

"Here, let me try it. Perhaps I can manage it myself."

"But you don't know the combination."

"That's nothing. I have opened doors before without knowing how they were fas-

tened till I listened. There is such a thing as hearing the tumblers drop, and being able to work it without any previous knowledge of the combination. Don't you know that, my innocent young friend?"

"That's so. I had forgotten your reputation as a combination expert. Go ahead and try it."

The Serpent bent down to the door and listened carefully, as he moved the great nickel-plated knob with a light and delicate touch, Walter Vantine watching him with a curious smile playing around his lips.

Had not the Serpent become so interested in the vault door, he might have gone to the window and looked out to see whether the watchman was still at his post on the steps. Had he done so, he would have found that the old man had disappeared. But he was too busy with the combination, and was therefore totally unaware of a proceeding that might mean danger to him.

"This is a pretty tough lock," he muttered, after some five minutes of futile work. "I seem to get close to it every once in a while, but I can't quite make it. I can hear some of the tumblers drop, but the door won't open, all the same. Can't you do anything, Walter?"

"I have done all I can," was the answer, "and I think the lock must have got out of order in some way."

"I guess you are right," agreed the Serpent. "I'll give it another whirl, and if that don't do, we shall have to try some nitro-glycerine."

"Whatever you say," assented the young man, indifferently.

The Serpent applied himself again to the knob, and a look of satisfaction spread over his face as he felt that he was approaching success. His quick ear caught the muffled sound of the machinery of the lock moving, and at last, with a cry of triumph, he found that he had accomplished the feat!

"Now for it, Walter!" he exclaimed, exultantly.

He seized the handle of the vault, gave it a turn, and then, with all his strength, pulled open the ponderous steel door.

As he did so, he was confronted with a pistol, as the watchman walked out of the vault, and looked into his eyes with a glance that seemed to pierce him through and through.

Uttering a cry of deadly, superstitious fear, the Serpent put out his hand and clutched at the beard of this awful figure walking out of the blackness of the vault. As he did so, the beard came away in his hand, and Jim Daly, the Serpent, was looking in the face of Cool Bob, the Twister Detective!

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLOTTING IN THE DARK.

BARNEY pulled up his horse at the spot where Guttersnipe was so comfortably engaged in conversation with the girl, and looked curiously at the couple, while Guttersnipe continued to talk with a freedom of airy badinage that would have done credit to any experienced man of the world.

The girl was tall and handsome, and, being several years older than her talkative companion, could listen to his conversation with a patronizing smile that belongs naturally to a grown young woman in the company of a youngster. There was certainly no "mash" in the case, she regarding Snipe as nothing more than a child.

"Well, Kate, we got away wid all der mugs, as I told yer we would. Me an' Cool Bob is too much for anyt'ing dey have down dere in Baxter street, an' don't yer forget it."

"I won't forget it, Snipe," responded the girl, in whom the reader has no doubt recognized Kate Fairleigh. "You will be a great detective some day, if you don't allow yourself to be spoiled by those people in Baxter street."

The boy flushed, as he answered, quickly: "Now, see here, Kate Fairleigh. Did you ever know me ter do anyt'ing dat was actual crooked? Wasn't I allers held down in dat place, an' used only ter see dat dere was no plant ter catch dem mugs, an' didn't I allers stop when dey wanted me ter go in ter a job myself? Dey was not able ter make a crook of me, though dey tried hard enough. Somet'ing allers held me back, an' I made

up my mind dat I'd use what I learned about der crowd dey run with ter fight 'em on der side of her law. Guttersnipe has never been a t'ief, or a crook, an' he never will be."

The boy spoke with unusual earnestness, and there was a tear in Kate Fairleigh's eye as she grasped him by the hand, and said:

"You are a good boy, and I, who was kept a prisoner in that hateful place so long, can sympathize with you. They used me in about the same way as they did you, and the only thing I can reproach myself with is that I prevented Walter Vantine getting away from that ball-room the other night, and I did that only because Captain Corden had told me to do it, so that he might better obtain a hold on that fearful man, who called himself the Serpent."

"Phwell, is it all settled?" broke in the voice of Barney Doran. "Oi see yez are shaking hands on it. When is the wedding to be? O'd loike to be at the wedding, so Oi would, just to git a piece of the cake, be jabbers."

"Come off!" retorted Guttersnipe. "You're one of dem mugs what t'inks a feller must be makin' love just 'cause he's talkin' ter a dame. Me an' Kate is old friends, an' I don't know whether we'll ever be married, though I wouldn't mind casting in me lot wid her, as der novel-writers say, if she was willin'."

"We must wait a few years," laughed Kate. "I want a husband that I can look up to, and I'm nearly a foot taller than you now, you know."

"Dat don't make no difference," responded Guttersnipe, valiantly. "I'd fight fer yer, just as much as if I was as big as Billy the Bowler, and twice as ugly."

"Begorra, thot's roight. He's a dandy, so he is, an' Oi'd back him against Billy de Bowler, or any one loike him, if he was given a fair shake," declared Barney, warmly.

"Dat's all right. I don't want no sich jolly as dat. Dere's work ter do, an' don't you forgit it."

"What is it, Snipe? You know I've been here with that young lady for twenty-four hours, and I don't know what's going on."

"Git inter dat cab," commanded the boy, ignoring her question.

The girl was going to ask why, but she had so much confidence in this waif of the streets, that she contented herself with reminding him that she had no hat on, but only a shawl thrown over her head, and that, moreover, the dressmaker was up in her room, waiting for her to get through with her interview with the gentleman who had sent up word that he wanted to speak with Miss Fairleigh on particular business.

"Dat's right," agreed the boy. "Go upstairs, get your hat an' cloak, an' say good-by, and den come right down."

In less than five minutes the girl was sitting in the cab, while Guttersnipe, after looking carefully around to make sure that the Bowler was not in the vicinity, ordered Barney to drive up-town as quickly as he could make his horse go, without appearing to be running away, and to stop a block away from the Vantine bank, but out of sight of any one who might be on the watch from the bank.

Barney did not know what all this meant, but he had so much faith in the boy that he did not even inquire what it meant. He had his suspicions, but he was quite willing to trust to the gumption of Guttersnipe, for which he had an almost superstitious reverence.

"Where are we going, Snipe?" asked Kate, who had too much woman's curiosity to take things as quietly as Barney.

"I believe dat bank job is being done ter-night, an' if it is, we'll find Captain Corden somewhere about, an' he may want help. See?"

"Yes," answered Kate, and said no more. It was but a short time, comparatively, when the cab stopped at the corner of a street, and Guttersnipe knew that they were in the vicinity of the bank.

"Hitch yer horse, Barney, an' come along," commanded the boy, who had fallen naturally into the position of captain of the expedition.

Barney found a convenient hitching-post, and obeyed without a word. Then the

three walked swiftly but cautiously around the corner until they could see the bank a block away.

"Keep in der shadder of 'der houses," directed the gamin.

Like phantoms the three stole along close to the fence that was only broken at intervals by a high flight of steps leading to the door of each of the great brown-stone mansions. The night had become very dark, and when out of the glare of the electric lights, it was hard to distinguish any object, whether moving or stationary.

"Look out!" said the boy, suddenly, as he made out a figure in the doorway at the corner. "Stay here a minute till I come back."

Without waiting for a response, the boy ran along swiftly by the fence till he was so close to the house where the figure was standing in the doorway that he could make it out to be a woman. The woman was in black, with a large bonnet which partly concealed her face, and she was leaning up in a corner against the door in such an attitude that the quick wit of the boy told him she was slumbering on her feet.

"I've got to find out what you are doing dere," he muttered to himself. "It ain't natural fer a woman ter be standing outside a house at dis here time of night widout dere is somet'ing crooked in it. Der bank looks all right, but den it wouldn't be likely ter show on der outside whatever might be goin' on inside."

Guttersnipe was not lacking in cunning, and his mind was logical, even if he did not know what the word logic meant.

He made up his mind what to do on the instant. Moving more cautiously than ever, he reached the foot of the high flight of steps, and tried to distinguish the features of the mysterious woman at the top.

"Durn her ugly picter. She is standin' sideways, so I can't see her face, but I'll see it all the same," he muttered.

Slowly and cautiously he began to crawl up the long flight of steps. He had got a little more than half-way up when the woman moved uneasily, as if half-awake, and turned her face so that the full reflection of a distant electric lamp fell upon it.

The light was very dim, but it enabled him to distinguish the features of Morris Cohen!

"Just what I t'ought," was Snipe's mental comment. "On'y I wanted ter be sure. I t'ought it would be funny if dere was two old women in dat rig walkin' about dis part of New York. All right, my sheeny friend. I'll fix you dis time. You'll never play yer tricks wid Guttersnipe any more, nor any one else except Inspector Byrnes, if I have anyt'ing to say, an' I t'ink I have."

Morris Cohen had evidently awakened, for he moved up and down on the broad stone step under the doorway, but Snipe crouched in a corner, and Morris did not see him. The Jew shook himself, and then seeking his comfortable corner, snuggled up in it, as if preparing for another doze. He felt satisfied that the Serpent was all right in the bank, and as he had nothing to do with the job except to keep watch, he was not bothering himself with anything beyond his own department.

The boy waited until Morris had settled down, and then he withdrew as quietly as he had come.

"Say, here's somet'ing fer yer both ter do," he said, as he rejoined his companions.

In a few words he disclosed his plan, and Barney and Kate both entered into it heartily. It was to overpower Morris, and put him in a place of safety, and then go boldly to the bank and find out what was being done there, for Guttersnipe felt sure that the Serpent was operating inside, and that if anything was to be done to prevent the robbery, it must be accomplished at once.

The three moved quietly and cautiously to the house where Morris was still leaning in his corner, utterly unconscious of the proximity of any foe, and then Guttersnipe and Barney went softly up the steps, the boy in the lead.

As they reached the top, Barney stumbled and fell headfirst upon Morris. Quick as a flash Morris drew a blackjack and struck at Barney. The boy was too alert for him, however, and he stopped the weapon before it reached the head of the Irishman.

Then there commenced a struggle that gave evidence of the immense strength possessed by the Jew, especially now that he was desperate. He seemed to realize that the meshes of the law were drawing around him, and he fought with the tenacity of a wild beast at bay, who sees only death in capture.

But Morris, strong as he was, would not have been a match for Barney alone. The Irishman was taken by surprise, and when Morris struck at him he fell down two of the steps, but Guttersnipe's interposition prevented Morris taking advantage of the accident, and he felt the Irishman's clutch on his throat before he could follow him down.

Guttersnipe jumped around the combatants, but now that he had taken the black-jack away, he could not do anything else, because the combatants were moving around so much that it was not easy to distinguish one from the other in the darkness.

The two men practiced all the tricks known to the trained athlete, and the Jew showed that he possessed a knowledge of scientific wrestling that would hardly have been expected of such a man. As for Barney, he had all an Irishman's love for manly sports, and had been the terror of Ballygooran before he left the "ould dart," besides winning several prizes for wrestling at the athletic club in the Tenderloin District of New York, of which he was a member. With two such redoubtable wrestlers, it is no wonder that the combat looked doubtful for a few moments. But then Barney, with a dexterous turn of the wrist and ankle, sent Morris flying into a corner, and was kneeling on his antagonist's chest before the latter could recover himself.

Guttersnipe raised the thick stick that he had taken from Billy the Bowler, as if he would have liked to give his old-time enemy a hearty crack with it, but Kate held his hand, as she whispered that it would be a cowardly act to strike the man now that he was helpless.

Guttersnipe did not answer, but he dropped the club, showing that he agreed with her, and then he put the stick to another use. Drawing from one of his pockets some stout cord, with a big fish-hook on the end, indicating what it had been used for, he dexterously thrust the stick across the Jew's back and under his arms, and tied it there with the ease and skillfulness of an old sailor so that Morris Cohen was as helpless as a trussed chicken.

"Now, Kate, you just stand here till we come back."

"What for?" asked the girl, who did not relish the arrangement.

"Don't yer see? Cohen is here on guard, while dey's workin' der racket in der bank. If dey looks out, an' don't see Cohen here, dey will smell a rat, an' de old scheme may fall t'rough. If you stand here dey won't be able ter tell you from Cohen."

The girl did not demur any longer, but took her stand as directed, and in another five minutes Morris Cohen was in the cab, that had already seen so many strange adventures, and was tied in hand and foot, Snipe producing a lot more fish-line for this purpose.

Then he and Barney hurried back to relieve Kate, just as a flood of light came from one of the windows of the bank, and a face was seen, apparently looking out to see whether Morris Cohen was still at his post.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SERPENT RUN TO EARTH.

THE light at the window of the bank showed only for a moment, and then the building was as dark as before. Still, the flash of light told the three watchers that something unusual was going on, and they were all determined to find out what it was, Kate Fairleigh being just as earnest in the matter as her two companions.

They were all standing on the steps of the house, looking at the bank, while Guttersnipe's active mind was busy trying to settle what next to do, when a decided surprise burst upon them.

The door behind them suddenly opened, and four men appeared, three of whom each seized one of the party, who were all drawn firmly, though not roughly, into the house, and the door shut.

"Well, dis is der greatest gag I've ever

seen," exclaimed the irrepressible Guttersnipe, as he tried to see who their captors were.

All three were held so firmly, however, all in a straight line, with their faces toward the closed front door, that they could not see who or what manner of persons were holding them. They saw that the hall was magnificently furnished, with a hall rack and other articles of the most costly description, while under their feet was a soft carpet such as is not usually found in the hall of a house, unless it belongs to a person of lavish tastes and practically boundless wealth, but that did not surprise them, because they knew that the house was one such as would be occupied only by a very rich man.

They were not left long in doubt as to whose hands they had fallen into, for a tall, dignified gentleman stepped in front of them, and eyed each of them keenly, without speaking.

"Well, guvner, what's der guff?" asked Guttersnipe, whose bump of veneration was very small, and who cared no more for a millionaire than he did for any of his companions with whom he was in the habit of fishing from the dock at every opportunity.

"You are the boy they call Guttersnipe," said the stranger, quietly. "Are you not?"

"S'help me! I didn't know yer," cried Guttersnipe. "You must have growed since I seen yer last. You are Alec Vantine, the man w'ot owns der bank, ain't yer? W'ot fun we had yesterday mornin' didn't we?"

The banker smiled, and Barney Doran, whose eyes had been so wide open ever since Mr. Vantine stepped in front of him that it seemed as if they could never close again, said nothing. He had been surprised so often during the last day or two that he could not find words to express his state of mind.

"Well, Barney, haven't you anything to say to me?" asked the banker, pleasantly.

"Devil a word. I'm lettin' the b'ye here do all the talking," answered Barney dreamily.

"Who is this young lady?" asked Mr. Vantine, of Guttersnipe.

"Dis is de Kate Fairleigh w'ot I told yer about," was the ready answer. "An' a good girl she is, let me tell yer."

"I am sure of it. She shows it in her face," said the banker, in a musing tone, as if his mind was trying to grasp something that would persist in eluding him, as he added, under his breath: "Where have I seen that face before?"

At the same moment, he signed to the men who were holding the three visitors all this time, and they saw that they had been in the grasp of three stout footmen, who disappeared through a door at the end of the hall as the banker waved his hand in dismissal.

"Is dis your house, Alec?" asked Guttersnipe.

"No," answered Alexander Vantine, with a smile. "But it belongs to a very intimate friend of mine, who is out of town, and who has allowed me the use of it, so that I can keep my eye on my bank without it being known. I tell you this, because I know you are working with Captain Corden, and are therefore in my interest."

Guttersnipe uttered a loud whistle, while Barney looked into the banker's face with a mystified expression that seemed to ask some one to kick him, to bring him back to an understanding of where he was and what was going on.

"Well, do yer know dat dere's a job bein' worked at your bank over dere?" asked the boy, as the banker walked up and down, with his hands behind him, still thinking.

Alexander Vantine recovered himself, and smiled calmly, as he replied: "I know all about it, but the time has not yet come for me to act."

At this moment there was a flash of light in the window of the bank, like that the boy and his companions had noticed before, and that could be seen through the parlor window of the mansion, the banker having opened the door that communicated with the hall, evidently with the express purpose of affording a view of the bank window.

"That is the signal," he observed, quietly. "Will you and Barney come with me?"

"Dat's w'ot we are here fer," answered

Guttersnipe, promptly, while Barney simply bowed his head in acquiescence.

"Come, then," said the banker, putting on his hat, and unfastening the front door.

"And what is to become of me?" asked Kate Fairleigh.

"You can remain here, in the parlor," answered the banker. "In the library adjoining, you will find plenty of books, and I have no doubt you can find amusement for the short time we shall be absent."

"Why cannot I go with you?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"Well, may I never see the back of my neck, if dat ain't a nice t'ing for a girl to ask," exclaimed the Snipe.

The banker raised his hand to command silence, as he said to the girl, kindly:

"I do not think it is a sort of expedition in which a woman should be concerned. Jim Daly, the Serpent, is a desperate man, and there may be a deadly struggle there before we get him under control."

"That is the reason I want to be there," was the girl's answer. "I want to see Jim Daly brought to the end of his career. It is to him that I am indebted for the loss of home and friends, and I am always in hope of making him reveal certain secrets he holds about me, that may result in my being restored to my friends."

"Strange! What can she mean?" muttered the banker, adding aloud: "Well, if you are determined, I will not oppose your coming. But you must remember that you may need more nerve than is vouchsafed to every woman."

"Don't you worry about Kate," put in the irrepressible Snipe. "She is a thoroughbred, and I know it."

Without further parley, the banker opened the door, and looking cautiously around, to see that there were no eavesdroppers, went down the steps and crossed the road swiftly, with his three companions at his heels, Guttersnipe gallantly taking Kate by the arm, with an air of protection that would have been funny if he had not been so thoroughly in earnest.

The banker paused for a moment at the bottom of the steps leading to the bank, but, to the surprise of the others, did not ascend the steps to the bank door. Instead of doing so, he kept along down the side street, in the deep shadow, till he came to a blank wall that seemed to be a continuation of the bank building.

"Follow me closely," he whispered to Guttersnipe, who was immediately behind him.

"You bet!"

Mr. Vantine paused, and ran his hands over the bricks till he found a certain spot, that he pressed with his forefinger. Then his companions saw that what they supposed was a brick wall was not just what it seemed. In response to the pressure of the banker's finger, there was a click, as of a spring lock, and then he pushed with his hand on the wall, and a regular door opened, revealing a black space into which he plunged unhesitatingly.

The door was of iron, but covered outside with paint and plaster in so ingenious a manner that no one would suspect it to be anything but brick and mortar unless he made the very closest inspection in broad daylight, and even then he would not be sure of discovering the secret.

This door was very rarely used. In fact, until this night it had not been opened for years, and its very existence was known to only two or three persons besides Alexander Vantine. One of those persons was his son, Walter, and another was the Twister Detective!

The banker waited till all three of his followers were inside, and then he closed the door softly, the spring-lock dropping into place with a barely perceptible click.

"Be jabers, this is as black as a nager's pocket," muttered Barney Doran, as he held to Guttersnipe's shoulder.

They could hear the banker moving softly in front of them, and they followed him with great caution.

At length a door opened, and they found that they had been walking along a narrow hallway, ending in the door that the banker had opened, and through which a faint glimmer of light could be discerned.

"Now be very quiet," whispered the

banker. "I want to see how the land lies." He walked through the doorway, and disappeared.

"Now, phwat will we do?" asked Barney, softly, depending on the boy, as usual. "Keep still," was the answer.

The girl was trembling. The whole proceeding was so mysterious and uncanny that she feared she knew not exactly what.

"Don't be afraid, Kate. I'm wid yer," whispered the gamin.

Suddenly there was the sound of a pistol-shot, followed by a confusion of men's tongues, and the banker staggered through the doorway, with a streak of blood on his pale face, and he fell in a heap at the feet of Kate.

"Take care of him, Kate!" shouted Snipe. "Barney, follow me!"

"Oi wull thot!" cried the Irishman, only too glad to get into some sort of active business, as he followed the boy through the doorway.

Snipe rushed in headlong, and a flash of light blinded him temporarily, so that he could not see what he was doing or where he was going. He heard Corden's voice cry: "Look out!" and then he turned a corner set down a hole that seemed to him for the moment to be about half a mile deep, while Barney, caught around the waist by Walter Vantine, was only just saved from the same unpleasantness.

"Oh, save us! Phwat's going on?" cried Barney, in his bewilderment, as he tried to see some enemy that he could hit.

"What's going on?" repeated the detective, whom Barney could not see, and yet who seemed to be somewhere close at hand. "What's going on? Why, we've got Jim Daly, the Serpent, safe at last!"

"Have you?" yelled the stentorian tones of Jim Daly, as he sprang apparently from the floor at Barney's feet, and aimed a blow at the detective's breast with a long, wicked-looking knife. "Not yet, Cool Bob!"

It would have been the last moment of the detective but for the prompt, yet mechanical action of Barney Doran, who struck up the knife, and sent it spinning to the other end of the long room, just in time to keep the point from entering the detective's breast.

The Serpent uttered a yell of mingled rage and defiance, and then darted through the doorway, where Kate Fairleigh was kneeling on the floor, supporting the head of the banker, who had fallen into a swoon.

The Serpent did not notice Kate or Alexander Vantine in the darkness of the hallway, and as he rushed through, intent on gaining the secret door, that had been revealed to him by the entrance of the banker and his companions, he stumbled over the girl, and went sprawling at full length, his head coming in contact with the wall so heavily as to stun him for the moment. Before he could recover, Barney Doran was upon him, holding him down by the back of his neck with a grip of iron.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TABLES TURNED ON SNIPE.

GUTTERSNIPE was too active a youth to remain quietly in a hole, either actual or figurative. When he dropped through the floor he fell squarely on the Serpent's shoulders, knocking him backward, just as he was trying to crawl out of the trap into which he had fallen.

"You little whelp!" hissed the Serpent. "If I had time, I'd—"

"Oh, git off de earth! You mugs make me tired. I own as much of this here hole as you," was Snipe's rejoinder, as he coolly placed his feet on each side of the Serpent's head and drew himself out.

Jim Daly uttered a growling oath, but he could not help admiring the reckless pluck of the boy, and he did not retaliate to any greater extent than to try to throw Snipe to the bottom of the strange place in which they found themselves—an attempt that was a signal failure, for the boy was expecting it.

With a light spring, Snipe reached the floor above, and crawling out between the detective's feet, bestowed a knowing wink upon Walter Vantine, and scuttled out of the front door.

How the Serpent got out and what happened then, we know already.

"I wouldn't trust Morris by himself now, even if he was chained down wid de Atlantic cable," observed Snipe, confidentially, to himself as he looked across to the place where the cab stood. "I don't know whether he's in de cab now, but I'll soon find out. Dem fellers in de bank has de Serpent all right, I guess, an' I ain't wanted dere 'cept p'raps me girl will get lonesome while I'm away."

The boy grinned at his conceit, and then walked deliberately down the long flight of steps of the bank, with his gaze on the cab, which loomed up indistinctly in the darkness.

Suddenly he stopped and strained his eyes to try to make out what that moving figure could be at the horse's head.

"It's a woman, by jiminy! Hully chee! If dat Morris ain't going ter git away, I'm a goat!"

To run down the remainder of the steps and over to the cab was the work of a very few minutes for Snipe.

"It vas all right, Morris, my tear. I vas here! Oh, Mother of Abraham, v'at vas they been doing to my poy?" squeaked a voice that Snipe knew only too well.

"Strike me wealthy, if dat ain't de old woman. Who gave her de tip, I wonder?" thought Snipe, as he kept in the shadow of the houses for a moment, preparatory to making a rush upon Mother Rachel. "Oh, yes, sure enough!" he added, as he saw through the affair. "She knew dat dis here job was bein' done, an' she t'ought it might be as well for her to come and look after her share of de ducats. Blaw her ugly old hide! She'll fool herself dis time, if de court knows herself!"

The boy was a little nervous about tackling Mother Rachel, especially if she had Morris to help her. Guttersnipe was only a boy, after all, and he knew by experience that the old woman was not deficient in strength, and that her arm would gain increased power from the vindictive feeling she bore toward him, especially after the way he had beaten her at her own game in his crib under the wharf on the East River.

The old woman was leaning into the cab, and Snipe heard Morris growling inside, as he tried to break away from his cords.

"Now is my time to take a hand," muttered Snipe.

He rushed at Mother Rachel, and seizing her by her ankles, gave a shove that she could not resist, and turned her head over heels into the cab, on top of Morris.

"Ow! V'at you doing? Git off my head!" howled Morris, as Snipe, quick as a flash, unhitched the horse, and leaping upon his back, drove him full tilt up the street.

Snipe's object was to get to a police station, or to find a policeman, and turn over the two worthies inside the cab into the hands of the authorities. He did not stop to think that he might find himself in a rather awkward position, and that Morris and his mother could probably swear harder than he when it came to what he would have called a "show-down."

He was sitting on the horse, well toward his neck, whooping and yelling, while the two people in the cab, all of a heap, were too much confused to know just what was going on. They knew that they were being driven away, but neither of them had recognized Snipe, and the idea that possessed them both was that some mischievous stranger was having fun with them.

The old woman had fallen in such an awkward position, with her head on the floor, and her knees in Morris' chest, that she could not get out in a hurry. Morris was still tightly tied, and of course he could not assist her. Moreover, Snipe had banged the two doors shut, which held the old woman still more firmly down.

"Get up! Get up! V'at vas you lying down there for?" gasped Morris, whose breath was being squeezed out of him.

"I can't get up, mein tear! I vas caught like I vas in a vise," came in smothered accents from the floor, where the old woman was squirming like a very ugly old toad.

Morris, bound as he was, writhed a little, and released the old woman's head from the corner into which it was thrust, and where her son's feet had held her still more firmly. With a mighty effort, she managed to get herself right side up, and then, recognizing

Snipe, sitting on the horse, and urging it along with all his might, she made a jump for him, pushing the two doors open with a crash, and actually lay over the horse's back, and pulled the boy down, so that he was lying backward, in imminent danger of falling off.

"Let go, will yer?" he bawled. "I'll drive de horse onter de sidewalk if you don't, and smash the whole outfit."

"Come back here, and untie me, vill you?" shrieked Morris, from the cab, who saw what was going on, and did not relish the idea of being smashed, without having the power to help himself in the least. "V'at an old fool you vas. I'll give that poy all the fun he wants if I vonce gets out of this."

"Don't you hear what Morris says?" cried Snipe, who only wanted to get out of the clutches of Mother Rachel for a moment, feeling confident that he could attend to everything after that.

The old woman was in a quandary. She did not think it safe to loosen her hold on the boy, and she did not want to leave her son in his present predicament.

Giving one vicious wrench at the boy's shoulder—which, however, had no effect save to cause him to pull at the lines with one hand, and turn the horse toward the sidewalk—she drew herself back into the cab and fumbled at the cords on her son.

They had been tied carefully and scientifically, however, and she fumbled at them for a minute without getting one of the knots untied.

"Cut it! V'at vas you doing? Vas you have no sense?" grumbled Morris.

The old woman drew a formidable jack-knife from her dress, and, opening the blade with her teeth, cut at the cords.

"Oh!" shrieked Morris. "You vas carving me all up! Cut the string, but don't stick the knife into me."

Snipe, who had brought the horse to a quiet canter, laughed in his sleeve. He could not help enjoying the troubles of the people in the cab, although he knew that he was in a rather bad predicament. The sight of a boy riding on the back of a cab-horse, with no one in the driver's seat, would attract attention anywhere, and he had seen plenty of belated pedestrians staring at him, including one or two policemen. The pace had been too hot for any interference, however, and so far he had not been disturbed by any one except Mother Rachel.

Half a dozen cuts at the cord, and Morris was free.

"Now, Morris, my tear, help me get that Guttersnipe into the cab, and ve vill soon have him down in Baxter street again."

"Yes, and the next time v'at he gets away, we will give him leave stay," said Morris.

He was about to spring out of the cab, but sunk back with a cry of pain. The cords had held him so long that he was too benumbed for any activity, and he found it out now.

"V'at vas the matter with me?" he exclaimed, helplessly. "I vas not able to move meinself. Rub mein arms, mother. Rub them hard, and help me to be meinself again."

Mother Rachel did as requested, and after a few moments of vigorous rubbing, punctured by groans of pain from Morris, that gentleman was able to sit up, and take active part in the job on hand.

Meanwhile, the boy had, quietly and unnoticed, climbed off the horse's back, to the cab, and up to the driver's seat, where he had more control of the animal, and where he could watch the proceedings of the Cohens through the trap in the roof of the vehicle.

He was not long left in doubt as to the intentions of the mother and son. Morris stood up and grasped the lines, thus taking all control of the horse out the hands of the boy above.

"Hully chee! Dat's what I might have expected," muttered Snipe. "Pity I didn't stay where I was. So long as I was on de horse's back dey couldn't do much harm, 'cause I wouldn't have allowed 'em to play de trick de old woman did more dan once, you can bet."

The Jew had the horse now, and he drew him up to the curb and stopped him.

As he did so, Snipe leaped to the ground. He was not quick enough to escape Morris,

however, who, now that he had got over the numbness caused by the cords, was as nimble as a cat, in spite of his being hampered with the woman's clothes, that, of course, he had worn all the time.

"You young rascal! You was caught now!" cried Morris, in triumph, as he seized the boy by the neck, and threw him into the gutter.

"Not yet, Morris, my old gilly! I don't allow no mug in woman's togs ter take liberties wid me!" returned the boy, as he sprung from the gutter like lightning, and delivered a blow in Morris Cohen's chest.

Snipe threw so much exertion into the blow that it made him recoil into the road, where Mother Rachel, who had got out of the cab on the other side, was just coming to the relief of her son.

"Vat was the matter, mein tear?" she croaked, in a sarcastic tone. "You was not quarreling with my son, vas you?"

As she spoke she seized the boy behind, and, with a sudden exercise of strength, threw him in a heap into the cab, as Morris, who had recovered from the boy's blow, leaped in on the other side, and held him down.

"Queeck!" cried Morris, breathlessly. "Ve must not be found here, an' there vas a policeman on the corner."

"Is there?" muttered Snipe, to himself.

Then, before his captors could interfere, or realize what he was about to do, he placed his two forefingers in his mouth, and emitted a whistle that could be heard nearly a quarter of a mile, and which woke up the police officer dozing on the corner so thoroughly, that he was fully persuaded he had heard something, and was almost inclined to make an investigation.

"Oh, you vicked poy!" exclaimed Morris, with a sneering grin. "Vere vasy ou learn to whistle like that? We must cure you of that habit right away."

He took from his mother the jackknife that she still held in her hand, and closing it, thrust it into Snipe's mouth, tying it there with the black veil from his bonnet, that he had worn in his character of an old lady. Then, with hasty movements, he picked up pieces of the cord that had bound him, and tied the boy's feet and hands.

"Now, mother, you vas vatch him, and I vill drive down to the crib," said the Jew, as he completed the tying of Snipe, very much to his own satisfaction and the corresponding discomfiture of his victim, who, however, was thinking hard in the hope of hitting upon some means of escape, even yet.

Mother Rachel seated herself by the side of Snipe, administering three or four sly punches in his ribs for her own personal satisfaction, as Morris climbed into the driver's seat and drove down town.

The horse was pretty well tired after all his running about during the evening, and the Jew did not urge him very fast. He was in no particular hurry, because he had made up his mind that it would not be safe to go back to the bank now, and that all he had to do was to get to the crib in Baxter street and wait till the Serpent let him know how the Vantine bank job had come out.

In due course he reached the store on Baxter street, and giving the usual signal, Ikey Bill made his appearance, and admitted the two Cohens and their prisoner.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SNIFE'S LITTLE SCHEME.

"Ah! Vas dot you, Ikey?" exclaimed Morris, as the door opened. "I vas glad to get home again. I have a nice, tear little boy in dot cab. Help me get him out."

"Where is he?" asked Ikey Bill, in rather a surly tone. "I think you might have let me do something on that Vantine job. I've heard something about the way it's going, and I don't like it."

There was a threatening ring in the man's voice, that made Morris look at him, first in surprise, and then in anger.

"Vat you mean? Vat you talking about? Do you think I vas lettin' you or any of the gang run my peesness? Why, I could hang the whole crowd of you, if I vas wanted to. You know dot, don't you?"

The Jew had worked himself in a perfect

fury, and was actually jumping up and down in his excitement.

"Vat's the matter, mein tear?" asked Mother Rachel, as she stood at the side of the cab, with one eye on Snipe, lying helpless and gagged on the seat, and the other on Ikey Bill.

"Mutiny! Dot's v'at it vas! But never mind! Vait! Dot's all! Vait!" answered Morris, jerkily.

Ikey did not say anything more, but went to the cab to see what was inside. He started as he recognized the boy. He had never been a particular friend of Snipe's, but he hated Morris so much that he was disposed to do anything to oppose him.

"Don't see any use in tying the boy up that way," observed Ikey. "But I suppose you know your business."

He leaned into the cab, and taking the boy in his arms, carried him into the store, Morris and Mother Rachel watching him very closely and suspiciously the while.

"Put him down," commanded Morris, when, safely inside the store, with the door locked, he looked at the boy who had caused him so much trouble, and who had come near beating him in his game altogether.

Ikey took the gag out of Snipe's mouth, without asking Morris's permission, and then, stooping down, with a knife in his hand, cut the cords that fastened his ankles.

No sooner was Snipe free to speak than he made good use of the privilege.

"You mugs think you are smart, don't yer?" he asked, of Morris, with a turning up of his nose that spoke unutterable contempt. "But you haven't got everything your own way yet. The police are on to this crib, and you will have dem here afore mornin'. You hear me."

Morris and Mother Rachel turned pale, although both laughed derisively. They were both thinking the same thing—what if the boy should be telling the truth, and the police really were about to make a raid? They knew that a turning up to the light of the interior of this crib on Baxter street would reveal a good many secrets that it would not be healthy to them to be made public property.

"Get him into the lower room right away, Ikey," ordered Morris, apparently forgetting his late dispute with the man.

"Put him down yourself," was Ikey Bill's response to this command.

"Vat?" yelled the Jew. "Von't you do as I tell you?"

"No."

There was no mistaking the determination of Ikey Bill. It was, as the Jew had said, a clear case of mutiny.

"Vat you think of this?" asked Morris, of Mother Rachel in a tone that expressed his utter astonishment at the presumption of the man.

"Crazy," was Mother Rachel's sententious comment.

"Vell, I'll take him down meinself, and then you look out for yourself. You vas in a bad fix, I tell you," said the Jew, looking at Ikey Bill in a threatening manner.

Ikey Bill shrugged his shoulders, and beat his hand upon a pile of coats that happened to lie on the counter by his side until he raised a perfect hurricane of dust.

Mother Rachel began to sneeze violently. The coats had lain there for some time, and the pungent dust was very irritating to the nostrils, hers being unusually sensitive.

"Vat you doing, you idiot? You are spoiling them coats, and choking us all with dust," she spluttered.

Morris caught the dust at this moment, and he began to sneeze as violently as his mother, while Ikey Bill, with a malicious grin, beat the coats with the palm of his hand, harder than ever.

Had he any particular motive in this performance, more than that of annoying the two Cohens? It really seemed like it, for he never took his eyes off Snipe, although Morris and his mother were too much occupied in sneezing to pay attention to anything else.

While the sneezing was at its height, Ikey dropped the knife with which he had cut the cords binding Snipe's ankles, and then, as if accidentally, shuffled one of his feet and gave the knife a kick toward the boy.

Snipe was naturally keen, and the position in which he was now made him more so than usual. He was looking for some chance of

escape, and he knew instinctively that Ikey Bill was on his side.

Snipe had been sitting on a trunk, with his hands tied before him, but his feet were free, and with them he soon drew the knife so closely that he could reach it with one of his hands by stooping forward, without making any violent movement.

In another moment he had the knife in his hand, and, although it was not a very easy task, he managed to cut the cords that bound his wrists, and he was free so far as his personal movements were concerned.

Ikey had stopped his thumping of the coats, and Morris, wiping his face and swallowing his indignation with considerable of the dust, commanded Mother Rachel to go and open up the traps to the lower floors.

"Who is in the house, Ikey?" he asked, in a very mild tone—so mild, indeed, that Ikey suspected treachery of some kind at once, while Snipe muttered, "case of jolly, sure!"

"No one," answered Ikey, shortly.

"Vat? Have all the tear boys gone out for the night? Dot was very bad. They must learn to stay in nights, like good little boys. Eh, Ikey?"

"Don't know nothing about it," growled Ikey, uncompromisingly, while Snipe grinned, as he saw that Morris could not win the man over, however hard he might try.

"Vell, go on, mother. Open up the place, and ve vill put this bad boy down below, where he von't do no more harm."

Mother Rachel unlocked the parlor door, and opened the trap in the floor, under the carpet, in the manner described in an earlier chapter, the three others watching her carelessly, for they were all familiar with the workings of the place, so that it had no particular interest for them as a curiosity, as it would have had for a stranger.

"Go down and see that everything is clear," ordered Morris.

"Vell, I don't know about dot," objected Mother Rachel. "Suppose I find dot everything isn't clear, I'll be caught, and you vill get away, and where vill I be?"

"Down below," answered Morris, with a grin.

"Morris, you vas an undutiful son."

"And you vas an undutiful mother. Go on. Who could be down there, when everything is closed?"

The old woman looked in the direction of Ikey in a peculiar way, that Morris understood, evidently, for he said, quickly and impatiently:

"Don't fear dot. He wouldn't dare. It would be as much as his neck vas worth to give the crib away. You can trust Ikey. Can't she, Ikey, mein tear?" he added, turning toward that morose individual.

Ikey answered with a sniff, that might mean anything, and the old woman disappeared down the trap.

"Look around everywhere," called Morris, down the hole.

He was leaning over, peering into the darkness, and listening intently, that he might have early notice if there was anything wrong—for he did not place such implicit confidence in Ikey as he had pretended—when Snipe stole up behind him, and touched Ikey on the shoulder.

Ikey turned quickly, and he and the boy exchanged glances that spoke volumes, without either uttering a word. They understood each other in a moment.

The boy had conceived a plan, that he believed Ikey Bill would help to carry out, although the man had been guilty of so many offenses, in the way of picking pockets, and crimes of that nature, that he would not dare to show himself where there were likely to be any officers of the law. Snipe meant to capture Morris Cohen again, bind him with the same cord he had worn before, put him in the cab, and take him back to the bank, so that Captain Corden would not know that he had ever been away.

The scheme was a bold one, and the boy was particularly pleased with it because it struck a vein of humor in his composition, and he thought it would be an excellent joke on Morris.

He could not explain all this to Ikey now, but he made him understand the main and primary purpose, which was to make Morris a prisoner and prevent the old woman from getting out of the lower part of the house,

where she was now blundering about, in accordance with her son's command.

Ikey was a saturnine individual, but he indulged in a quiet smile as he understood what the boy intended to do, and entered into the job heart and soul.

Morris was leaning so far forward that a comparatively slight push would have sufficed to send him headlong down the hole after his mother. But this was not Snipe's intention. He wanted Morris in the cab, outside the bank, and he was going to have him there. So, watching his opportunity, he suddenly seized Morris around the waist, and threw him to one side into the arms of Ikey Bill, which closed around him with a hearty, if not affectionate, hug, and then the boy snapped the trap into place, kicked the carpet over it, and turned the heavy table over that, so that the old woman was a prisoner, without any means of escape—at least for a time.

"Vat vas the matter?" spluttered Morris.

"Nothing," answered the apathetic Ikey.

Snipe could not control his joy at having overcome his late tormentor, however. He stepped up in front of Morris, and seizing him by the nose, gave it a vigorous tweak.

"No, nothing is de matter, Morris, only a little jolly. You and de oder mugs has got themselves into a nice little picnic, and I'm playing de music for you to dance to. See?"

"I'll hang you all!" howled the Jew. "Ikey Bill, you will be in the Tombs inside of twelve hours. I have the evidence all ready. I always keep it so that I can produce it any time. You vas not know dot before, eh? But you vill find out dot vas true."

Ikey seemed somewhat disturbed by this assertion of Morris, but Snipe treated it with the utmost contempt.

"What's de matter wid you?" he said.

"You wouldn't dare to go near no police, if you was to get a t'ousand dollars for it, an' you know it, Morris. Don't take no notice of his guff, but bring him out to de cab. All de cords is in dere, 'cept what was on me, an' dey is here, right handy."

As the boy spoke he picked up the cords that had been around his own wrists and ankles, and, knotting them together where they had been cut, soon had Morris tied up as scientifically as he was before.

"Shove the gag in his mouth," suggested Ikey Bill.

"Dat's right. I will. He made me wear it all de way down-town, an' we'll see how he likes it," observed Snipe.

So Morris Cohen was duly decorated with the big knife thrust between his teeth, with the vail that he had worn so gracefully fastened to it, to prevent its slipping out of place.

They carried him to the cab, and threw him upon the seat, adding the other cords they found in the cab, so that he should be surely tied up, and ready for the inspection of Captain Corden when they got to the bank.

From all that Snipe had seen at the bank, he had no doubt that the Serpent was a prisoner, and that the great Vantine bank job had resulted in the capture of one of the worst bank robbers in America.

"Coming with me, Ikey?" asked Snipe, as when Morris was safely inside, and the trap in the roof open, so that he could keep a constant eye upon the prisoner, he took his seat in the driver's place behind.

"No," answered Ikey. "Things are getting too hot around here. I guess I'll go to Chicago, and see the Fair. But don't say nothing. I believe you are a pretty good kid, and I only hope you'll get even with Morris."

"Oh, come along," said Snipe. "It will be lots of fun when I give him up to de police."

"No. No police in mine," answered Ikey with a slight shiver. "So-long, Snipe. Wish you luck."

"Thanks!"

Snipe had closed the door of the crib, and had the key in his pocket, and now he drove the horse as fast as he could go in his tired condition, and twenty minutes later the cab stood near the Vantine bank, with Morris bound and helpless, just as he had been before Mother Rachel appeared to rescue him—a rescue that had ended most unfortunately for herself as well as her precious son.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SCORE ANOTHER FOR COOL BOB.

WE must now go back to the moment when the Serpent found himself so thoroughly checkmated by the detective at the door of the great iron vault.

The Serpent had no more idea of being met in such a manner as that than he had that the detective was in the bank at all.

When the beard came away in his hand, and he saw that dreaded face, he realized that he had been completely fooled, and his first thought when he had recovered himself a little, was not how to overcome the detective, but how he might be revenged on Walter Vantine, who had sunk carelessly upon the sofa in his father's room, and was gazing at the scene with a keen enjoyment of the Serpent's discomfiture.

Not heeding the detective's pistol, that was still held on a line with his face, he turned and leaped upon the young man, with his knife in his hand.

But Walter Vantine was prepared for him, and, with the pistol, that he had drawn quick as a flash, he knocked the knife to one side, and fired a shot through Jim Daly's hat at such close range that the powder slightly scorched his cheek.

"Keep away from me, Jim Daly. I've kept my word with you. I've helped you to find your way into the vault, and if you discovered more in there than you expected, it is not my fault."

The bantering tone of the young fellow seemed to render the Serpent desperate, for he made another movement toward Walter, in spite of the presented pistol, and would doubtless have done some damage, had not the detective, who had stepped up behind him, seized the hand that held the knife, and given it a twist that made the other yell with pain, although he did not drop the weapon.

The Serpent tore himself away, and retreating to the open door of the vault, so that he stood just inside, with his face toward the detective and Walter, hissed:

"Now, come on, the two of you. You have pistols. I have only my knife, but I am ready to meet you both in fair fight. You know me. I'm Jim Daly, called the Serpent, because I am always ready to strike, and I never ask for mercy. Come on!"

"Jim Daly, you are a fool!" observed the Twister Detective, quietly. "Why should we fight you? We have you dead to rights. Caught you in the very act of robbing the Vantine bank. You'll go comfortably to Sing Sing. I have nothing more to do with you."

"You think you have me, do you?" hissed the Serpent.

"Kind of think so," was Cool Bob's response.

"Then you are mistaken."

"I don't think so. I took all precautions to nab you, and I think I have succeeded. You did not know there was another door to that vault, at the back, reached by a secret entrance and hallway from the side street. But I did, and I used it. You think you have a pull on this young man with your bogus forged checks, and your agreement that you forced him to sign. They are not worth the paper they are written on to you. Alexander Vantine would not believe anything you could say or any document you could produce."

"You devil!" muttered the Serpent, between his set teeth.

"I beg your pardon," said the detective, with his tantalizing smile. "So you see, Jim Daly, you can only just stay here till I bring up the wagon for you to take you to the nearest police station. You are a pretty smart crook, but you are only a crook, after all, and you must expect a crook's ending of your career."

The detective spoke in an even tone that was maddening to Jim Daly, who began to see that he was hemmed in on all sides, and that he had not one chance in a thousand of escaping from his present predicament.

It was not the man to give up till he was absolutely overpowered, however, and his mind was busily plotting, to find some means of escape—and revenge.

An idea suddenly struck him, and he acted upon it immediately. While speaking he slowly withdrew into the vault, inch by inch, and so slyly that Corden did not suspect his design.

At last, when he had got so far back that the heavy door could not touch his feet, which, as the door was at least eighteen inches thick, obliged him to go back that distance, he reached forward, and grasping the edge of the door, pulled it toward him with all his strength.

The ponderous mass of iron and steel worked smoothly enough when once he had got a start on it, and he was able to pull it to before either the detective or Walter could interfere.

The Serpent had noticed that the door far in the back which was only about four feet high, so that any one entering or leaving that way would be obliged to stoop—was open, and he determined to get out that way, if he could.

Two pistol-shots rung out as he pulled the door, and one of them came so near his hand as to tear a little piece of flesh off one of his fingers. But the sting did not stop him in his task. He pushed the door open a little, and then, with a tremendous tug, brought it to with such force that the lock snapped. Then he ran as fast as he could to the small door in the rear.

There were some large books on the floor of the vault, that he could not see in the dark, and he stumbled over them and almost fell. He saved himself from going down altogether, however, and with a headlong plunge, made for the doorway.

That stumble was fatal to his plan, even if he did not fall. He reached the doorway, and was in the very act of stooping to go through when it shut with a bang, and the snapping of the spring-lock, told him that now he was indeed a prisoner!

He heard the mocking laugh of the detective outside, and in his frenzy of rage and disappointment, he actually banged his head against the iron walls of the vault that held him as securely as if he had been in the strongest cell in the Tombs itself.

"Curse them! They shall not have it all their own way, even now!" hissed the Serpent, a few minutes later, when he had recovered a little from his rage, and set his usually cool wits to work. "It is evident the job has gone up for the present, and the best thing for me to do is to get out of here—if I can. If I can," he repeated, with a low chuckle. "As if there were anything in the power of Cool Bob or any of his gang that could hold Jim Daly down! No, I'll fool him now, and—I'll kill him when the time comes."

He gnawed his black mustache savagely, and set himself to think out what he should do. In truth, he was in an awkward predicament. He had fastened the door of the vault when he came in, and here was the small doorway at the back closed upon him. How could he get out? As he asked himself this question he noticed that the air was getting close and foul, and the horrible thought obtruded itself upon him that he might suffocate before he could escape.

"I believe that fellow Corden would do it if he took it into his head. He has no use for me," he muttered, bitterly.

The Serpent was not the man to spend his time in idle conjectures when there was work to do. He dismissed his fear of suffocation with a toss of the head, and made his way cautiously in the dark, which was now absolutely black, with both doors closed, toward the big front door of the vault.

He pressed against it with all his weight, but, as he had expected, it was as firm as a rock.

"I wouldn't care so much about being nabbed, if it were not for that fellow the Twister," he thought. "To think that Jim Daly—the Serpent—should be brought to such a pass with his eyes open. What a fool I was not to keep my eyes on that old watchman. And yet, his disguise was so good that I never suspected for a moment. Jim Daly, your brain must be softening, or you would never have neglected your own maxim, that you have acted by all your life, always to, think that things are not what they seem. When he looked like an old man, you should have made up your mind that he was not an old man, and that he might have been even Robert Corden. That's what you should have thought. Well, well, it is a fool's philosophy to lay out plans for times that have passed."

With this reflection he gave another mighty push on the steel door, almost without thinking what he was doing.

To his great astonishment, it yielded slightly, so that he could see a thin streak of light between the edge of the door and the framework of the doorway.

He was about to push again, and throw the door wide open, when his habitual caution and suspicion made him pause. *What would he find on the other side of the door?*

He was certain that it had been held securely by a fastening of some kind a moment before, and now that it was open, the fastening must have been removed by human agency.

He placed his ear close to the door and listened intently. Not a sound to give him an inkling of what was being done outside, and this very silence made him all the more suspicious!

Should he make a bold rush, and see? What else could he do? He did not know how soon the fulfillment of the detective's threat might be carried out, to bring the patrol wagon, and he swore to himself that there would be murder before he would submit to such an indignity. If he was to be pulled up short in his career, at least it should be done with some sort of style, and the people should never be able to say that the Serpent was dragged to the police station like a common criminal.

Taking out his knife, and grasping it firmly in his left hand, he held his black-jack in his right, and placing his right shoulder against the door, he shoved it wide open with all his force.

His knife was uplifted and his blackjack was ready to be used on the head of any one who might oppose him.

But his preparations were needless. *There was nobody in sight!*

Jim Daly was too suspicious to take all appearances for granted, although he reproached himself for having done so in the case of the old watchman, who had turned out to be his bitterest and most powerful enemy, Captain Corden the Twister Detective!

He ventured cautiously and slowly outside of the door, and stood perfectly still, with his back against the mass of steel, with its internal network of polished bars and bolts, looking with his piercing black eyes in all directions.

Neither Walter Vantine nor the detective were in the main apartment of the bank, he could swear.

He glanced into the banker's private room, which with its glass partition walls of wood, could be seen in every part from where he stood. No, there was nobody in there, although he imagined he could almost distinguish the sofa coming back to its own shape where the form of Walter Vantine had made an impression as he lay there a short time before. Everything in the bank had that indescribable air of having just been vacated, but not a sign of the people who were there just before was to be seen.

"This is a queer thing," thought the Serpent, "but it means mischief, I'll swear. I've had tussles with Cool Bob before."

He cautiously put his head around the corner of the big steel door, to make sure there was no one lurking there, although, as there was a wide crack on the hinge side of the door through which he could see almost the entire space behind the door, he had no fear of finding any one. It was only his habit of taking every precaution that made him look around at all.

"I'd give a hundred dollars to know what this means," he muttered.

Hardly had he given utterance to this remark, in a whisper that would have been inaudible to any one who might have been in the room, when he found out what it all meant, in a hurry.

He took another step forward, when, crash, the floor opened beneath his feet, and he was dropped into dark space beneath, just as a blinding flash of light in his eyes, and a shock that ran through his whole frame like a wire of fire, told him that electricity was being used against him. Before he could utter a sound, there was the loud snap of a wooden door over him, and he found himself in a sort of box, with the lid fastened so tightly over him that he could not see a ray of light.

"You must score another point for Cool Bob, Serpent!" cried a mocking voice that made the Serpent fairly writhe in an agony of rage and discomfiture, as the lid over his head opened, and he saw the detective and Walter Vantine looking down at him, while they held their revolvers ready for instant action.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RETRIBUTION AND RESTITUTION.

"YE shpalpeen! Faith, Oi'll choke the wickedness out of yez, if it wull come out, if yez don't keep shstill," spluttered Barney Doran, as he held the Serpent down to the floor, after his attempt to escape, which was frustrated by his falling over Kate Fairleigh and Alexander Vantine, as described in chapter twenty-four.

The Serpent felt that he was beaten, but his stubborn spirit forbade his acknowledging it. His only thought for the moment was to get Barney off his back, and then deal a deadly blow upon the detective, whom he was half disposed to regard as something more than human. He had lost his knife, but he felt that he could, with his bare hands, tear the mocking devil limb from limb, if he could only get hold of him, without interference, for a minute.

"Be Larry Flannigan's ghost, Oi'll not be able to hould him much longer," exclaimed Barney. "He's squirming like a tadpole, and he has a strin'th on him that w'u'd be useful to a B. & O. locomotive. Lie down, ye devil!" he roared, in a different tone, to the Serpent, as he bestowed a kick with his knee, with much heartiness and power.

Walter Vantine was kneeling by the side of his father, who, when his face had been bathed with water, recovered quickly, and, maintaining his dignified manner, in spite of his rather undignified position, asked whether the Serpent had escaped.

"No, father. We have him safe."

"Good! I have something to say to him."

With the assistance of Kate and his son, the banker arose to his feet, and staggered into the main apartment of the bank, for he was still a little weak in his knees. They assisted him to the sofa in his own little private room, where he could look at the Serpent, in the hands of Barney, at the edge of the hole in front of the vault, and which, it is perhaps needless to say, was a trap contrived on purpose to catch burglars who might be trying to enrich themselves at the expense of the bank.

The Serpent and Barney were having it hot and heavy, although without any noise. They were simply straining every nerve and sinew to overcome each other, and it seemed as if something must break unless the combat was stopped.

It was stopped, and by the detective, who had been watching the contest with the keen pleasure that an athlete always feels in a trial of strength between two others, almost as much as if he were himself a participant. Corden darted down suddenly, and seized the Serpent by the right wrist. Then, with the mighty twist that was irresistible, he pulled him over, so as to throw Barney upon the floor by the side of his late antagonist.

With a force that rendered the Serpent powerless, the detective twisted him to his feet, and the next moment had forced a pair of handcuffs upon him, and sat him down on the floor.

"Stay there, Serpent, and stay there quietly, or I'll put irons on your ankles," remarked Corden, with a smile. "I have them here."

Daly did not reply. He was looking at the banker, who was regarding him with a steadfast gaze.

"James Vantine," said the banker, suddenly, as he looked full into the eyes of the Serpent.

The Serpent turned an awful white, and then red.

"Ah, it is a good many years since you were addressed by your own name, is it not?" went on Alexander Vantine. "And I suppose you thought that I, who had not seen you since you were a lad of eighteen, would not recognize you now."

"What crazy talk is this?" said the Serpent, sullenly. "My name is Jim Daly, as hundreds of people in New York know, including many of the police," he added,

with a half smile in the direction of Captain Corden.

"I know that your name is James Vantine, and that you are the son of my dead brother. I know that you are an ingrate, a thief, and to all intents and purposes a paricide, for your father would be alive now if your evil courses had not driven him prematurely to his grave."

"This is all nonsense," growled the Serpent. "But, even if it were true, what then? It is not claimed that James Vantine—if there is such a man—ever committed any crime that Jim Daly will have to answer for. Is it?"

Kate Fairleigh was standing by the side of the banker, with her earnest gaze fixed upon the Serpent. The banker took her hand, as he continued:

"You had a sister, who was a baby, when you chose to throw off your own name, and become known as Jim Daly, the Serpent, in Frisco. Your mother was dead, and the pranks you played in California killed your father. Before he died he made a will, leaving all his property, fifty thousand dollars, to his baby girl, and disinheriting you entirely."

"An infernal robbery! That is what it was! Why should that brat have taken everything, leaving me a pauper?" interrupted the Serpent, his pent-up wrath bursting from him in a torrent.

"Aha! Then you acknowledge you are James Vantine, do you?" demanded the banker, triumphantly. "I thought we should obtain a confession from you at last! The little girl was helpless, and it was then a devilish idea seemed to enter your head. You abducted the baby, and hid her for years, with the intention, some day, when you thought it safe, to try and prove that she was dead, so that you could claim the property. Your father's lawyers have the will, but they have never been able to trace you or the child."

"This is the wildest yarn I ever heard," sneered the Serpent.

"Is it? Well, now let me tell you, that I have traced the baby sister, and can put my hand upon her at any moment."

"Can you? And where is she?"

"Here! And she is known as Kate Fairleigh," almost shrieked the banker in his excitement, as he led Kate forward.

"It's a lie!" yelled the Serpent, as he sprung to his feet and leaped toward the banker.

But, the detective was ready for him, and as he leaped forward, Jim Daly was seized by the arm, and turned completely around, with dislocated elbow. He fell to the floor in his agony, but Corden, who had had experience of this kind, knelt by his side, and taking his wrist in a firm grasp, pulled it with a jerk, and forced the elbow joint into place again, and without having to remove the handcuffs.

"Here's the wagon," cried Walter Vantine, as the sound of wheels was heard without.

"This is your carriage, Serpent," observed Corden, pleasantly.

The Serpent had been lying on the floor by the side of the detective, with all sorts of evil thoughts apparent in the changing expressions of his face. As he heard the wheels, and realized that he was to be dragged to a police-station like the common felon for whom he had expressed so much contempt, he reached up with his two handcuffed hands, and before any one knew what he was about, had drawn the revolver from the detective's hip pocket, and with a reckless cry of "Good-by, all," placed the weapon to his mouth and fired!

The shot was an effective one. Jim Daly, the Serpent, was dead, just as Walter Vantine opened the front door of the bank, and admitted a police officer and—Guttersnipe!

"Where did you come from?" asked the detective, in some surprise.

"Don't say a word! It was de prettiest plant I ever saw. You know, while you fellers was enjoying yerselves in de bank, I t'ought I'd just slip out an' see what Morris Cohen was a-doin' in de cab. It was a good job I went. Do yer know, dat sheeny was just gittin' out. He hadn't got all de ropes off, though, so I just held him till de wagon come. Den I hollered ter de mugs in de wagon, and when I told 'em what was bein'

done in de bank, an' who I was, and who Morris was, dey helped me git him inter de wagon, but dey made me come along, too. Well, dat was all right, 'cause I wanted ter come. See? An' here I am, an' Morris is out dere in der wagon, kickin' like a horse car mule on Third avenue."

While Guttersnipe was telling his story with the embellishments that suggested themselves to his lively fancy, the officer, at a sign from the detective, had thrown a rug from their wagon over the body of Jim Daly, and were carrying him out. They laid him in the bottom of the wagon, and then one of the officers asked Corden what they were to do with the boy.

"Don't do nothin' wid him," answered that irrepressible youth, for himself. "I'm here wid all me friends—Alec Vantine, Cool Bob and me girl. Git, an' take dat sheeny ter de station-house mighty quick, or he'll give you the slip."

"The boy is all right. Leave him here," said the detective, quietly, and the officers mounted their wagon, and drove away, with the two rascals—living and dead.

"And the Vantine bank has not been robbed, after all," observed Alexander Vantine.

"You never thought it would be, did you?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"Not when you laid bare the whole plot to me, and enabled me to take effectual steps to prevent it. But I'm afraid things would have been in a bad state here, but for you. As for you, Waker, Mr. Corden has told me all about the way in which you fell into that rascal's power. He is dead, but mind you, do not get into such company again. Alas, that I should ever have to say such a thing about a Vantine!"

"Yes, he was my cousin, was he not?" observed the young man, reflectively.

"He is dead. Let your relationship be buried in his grave," said the banker, solemnly.

The police would have buried James Vantine—known to them as Jim Daly, the Serpent—in Potter's Field, but Alexander Vantine could not forget that the dead was the son of his brother, and he had the funeral conducted from an undertaker's and the corpse deposited in consecrated ground.

Guttersnipe was a waif, and he could not tell who his parents were, or how he had got into the power of the gang in Baxter street. The banker made close inquiries among the police and others who had known the lad for a number of years, and satisfied himself that he was not naturally bad, and that he had never been known to commit a crime. That was enough for Alexander Vantine, who, beneath his stiff exterior, carried a warm heart. He sent the boy to a good school, and there is little in the gentlemanly, but high-spirited lad known as William Vantine to remind one of the Guttersnipe who was so long a companion of the Baxter street gang. When he has graduated, which he bids fair to do with high honors in due course, there will be a place for him in the Vantine bank.

The police descended upon the house in Baxter street, and broke up the gang completely. The clothing store is still there, but it is conducted on regular business principles, such as prevail in that unique quarter, and there is nothing of a criminal nature concealed about the premises, as there was in the Morris Cohen days.

Mother Rachel had prudently made herself scarce when she heard, as she soon did, that Morris was in custody and that the Serpent was dead. But she could not keep away from the neighborhood in which she had lived for so long, and in less than a month after Morris Cohen's arrest, she was also a prisoner, charged with being "a fence." She and Morris were both sent to Sing Sing prison for long terms, charged with being receivers of stolen property, and, in addition, Morris was proved to have been concerned in the bank robbery job that resulted in the death of Jim Daly.

Ikey Bill escaped. He was only one of the small fry, anyhow, and the police did not trouble themselves much about him.

Barney Doran gained the desire of his heart and is now one of the most trusted detectives on Superintendent Byrnes's force.

It took a great deal of time and trouble to prove that Kate Fairleigh was really the Ethel Vantine who had disappeared when a

baby, but, through the exertions of her uncle, Alexander Vantine, who was so well known and respected that his words carried extra weight, it was done at last, and she came into possession of her fortune of \$50,000, which, through the careful investments made by her uncle, is rapidly increasing. She lives with her uncle, and he has what he has not had since the death of his wife, a lady to preside over his household.

One of the frequent visitors to the Vantine mansion is a young man with an innocent-looking countenance, lighted up by dark-blue eyes with long lashes, who has a rich crop of golden-brown curls, and who is never excited or in a hurry. He pays particular attention to Ethel Vantine, and rumor says there may be a wedding before long, when the bride will be the niece of the rich banker, Alexander Vantine, and the groom, the famous Captain Robert Corden, the Twister Detective.

THE END.

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